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# ECHO OF A CRY





# ECHO OF A CRY

*A Story which began in China*



*by*

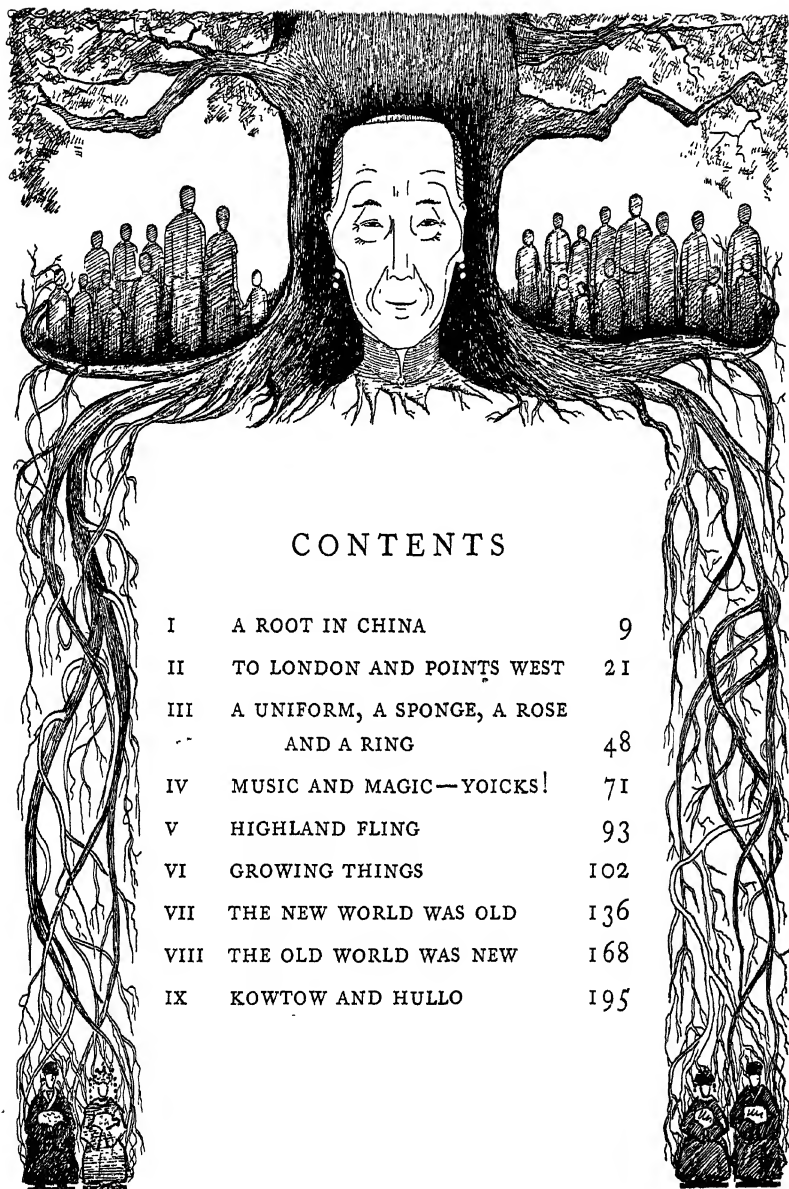
MAI-MAI SZE

*Illustrated from drawings by the author*

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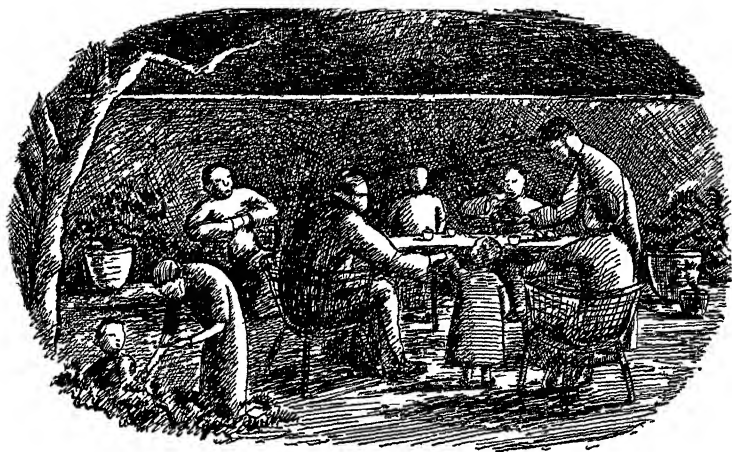
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# ECHO OF A CRY





## CHAPTER I

### A ROOT IN CHINA

IT was a lovely morning on the day I went to call on my Aunt. I remembered her only dimly from the last time we had met, when she had come to visit us in London — an imperious little lady over whom everyone had made a big fuss. Meanwhile, from stories and comments about her from various members of the family she emerged in my mind as something rather formidable. I was very nervous about going to call. I had come back to Shanghai resolved that within the family circle I would meet them on their own ground. I did not know whether I would be able to remember the things I should do and shouldn't do, what to say and what not to say, but I meant to make a good try. This aunt was eighty-two. She was the wife of the head of our family, so my first call required kowtowing and many polite phrases. From what I had heard she would be very strict on all the details.

'You don't have to go all the way down in the kowtow,'



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one member of the family had reassured me. 'They usually pull you up before you get all the way down, unless you're foolish enough to begin beyond arm's reach!' He was referring to the customary gesture by the elder, when he or she leaned over to raise the bowing member with protestations that a kowtow was not necessary. Woe, however, to him who took them at their word! One was supposed to insist on paying respects properly.

My mother accompanied me to the house. We were met at the gate, ushered to the front door and into the hall. It was a dim and gloomy interior. We passed through quickly and proceeded up a flight of steps, at the top of which was the door to my aunt's apartment. Wondering what she would look like, what she would say, if it really was going to be such an ordeal, I jumped as my mother suddenly called out a greeting. At the head of the steps stood a tiny figure, one hand resting lightly on the banister. While my mother protested that she should not come down to meet us, my aunt slowly navigated the top step. We met on the third step. Why didn't she receive us, as was expected, in her room? Awkwardly I began to bend my knees, wondering how on earth the kowtow was going to be completed. A small bony hand grabbed my wrist.

'No, no! Don't stand on ceremony! No, no! It is not necessary!'

'Yes, yes, San pa-mo!' I murmured with various other protestations that I was going through with the formality willy-nilly.

We struggled on that third step, clutching each other. How to avoid ending up in a tangle at the bottom of the steps? How did one conclude such a predicament?

Finally we calmed down and went into my aunt's apartment. There was a bareness to the room we entered, the few chairs and tables standing stiff and without cushions or

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upholstery. In contrast, the wall opposite the door was crowded with photographs of the family, singly and in groups, at various stages from babyhood to old age. I recognized a faded photograph of my father as a youth in a uniform he had worn at a high school in Washington. It had probably been the uniform of the high school band.

'Sit down,' my aunt said, pointing to a stool opposite her at the square table. She was sitting on a similar stool, her feet pointing downward with the tips of the toes just barely touching the floor.

As she turned to my mother with pleasantries about how nice it was to see her, she clapped her hands briskly twice. A girl entered with three cups of tea on a tray. With these she placed on the table some saucers of sweetmeats, nuts, and melon seeds.

'Take one!' my aunt said, indicating the dishes. I took a nut and placed it by my cup. As she talked to my mother, I felt her eyes dart at me, appraising me. In turn, I appraised her. Thin shreds of white hair were brushed straight back from her high forehead. The face was marvellously modelled, the bones of the brow and the cheeks prominently set. Her eyes were bright and shrewd but not without humour. If I don't have to be too polite, I thought, when we get to know each other we could have a lot of fun. I watched her mouth, the one feature that revealed her age. She sucked in her lips as she talked and took an occasional sip of tea. It was clear she had few or no teeth. When she smiled the mouth was like a baby's, pink and toothless. She spoke in a low little voice with a slight pipe to it.

'Have another one!' She pushed the dish of sweets towards me. I knew better than to refuse. The candy was wrapped in a piece of paper figured with Chinese printing in blue.

'Eat it!' she said. I put the sweet in my mouth and tried

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to bite into it to finish it as soon as possible. It was like a rock. I rolled it around, desperately trying to get a grip. It was too big to swallow in one gulp, so I sucked furiously and noisily.

'It is time she came back,' my aunt was saying.

'Yes, but she will be going away again soon,' my mother added. They were talking about me as if I were not in the room. I wondered if my aunt would speak to me at all, and if she did, what would be the first thing she would say.

Suddenly she turned on me ferociously. 'My dentist is a scoundrel!' This was so startling that I merely stopped sucking the sweet and looked at her. 'He put teeth into my mouth, and such teeth! You see!' She clapped her hands; on the appearance of the girl, she snapped a syllable of command at her and turned to me again. 'How he expects me to eat I don't know. Such stupidity! He doesn't know anything about teeth. Look!' She took a small tin mug which the girl now handed to her, and removed a square of flannel from the top. She peered in.

'Tsk! Tsk! A dentist indeed!' Poking the contents as if it were some small animal in captivity, she drew forth a set of large white grinning teeth. They seemed much too large for her, but as she popped them into her mouth they disappeared quite easily and settled with a click.

'Now look!' she said, pushing her face forward, chin out. She pulled her lips back, baring the rows of false teeth, and shook her head from side to side as if ready to devour the absent dentist. She then opened her mouth deliberately. To my astonishment, the upper row remained tightly clamped on to the lower, though her gums were wide apart. Forgetting myself, I burst out laughing.

'Laugh, will you? I tell you I am starving with such teeth to eat with. What a dentist! Curse him!'

'Why don't you go to another dentist?' I asked.

'That's it. I shall go to another dentist. This one has

cheated me but I shall go to someone else! Have another sweet!

So this was the formal call that I had anticipated with such nervousness.

As my aunt turned to talk to my mother, I looked over her head at the photographs on the wall. In one section there were a number of pictures of our branch of the family: my two brothers and myself, fat in padded gowns standing in front of a painted background; others of us in Peking, Tientsin, and Shanghai. Beside them there were photographs of us in England in our first foreign clothes, and in school uniforms, growing leggier and more foreign with each picture. And there were formal poses of each of my brothers in their graduation gowns at Cambridge, the ermine on the hoods suggesting the endless procession of white rabbits that had contributed this touch to tradition.

Reviewing the series taken from time to time of our family group, I could not help laughing at how uncomfortable we all managed to look each time, dressed in our Sunday best and staring fixedly into the camera.

'She seems of a cheerful disposition,' my aunt observed, mistaking the cause of the merriment.

Looking at the photographs I could understand how strange I must seem to the old lady, and that in her opinion it was high time we all came home. No wonder she thought we had become foreigners. What a lot of places had been home since the time of that first photograph in a Peking courtyard. I was then a Chinese baby sitting in my mother's arms with pink pompons on my head. Now home was half a dozen other places across the seas. I could feel no connection with that comfortable bundle in a padded coat.

Before the pompons adorned my head in Peking, a fortune-teller in Tientsin had written my name, birth date, and the year, on an even brighter pink slip of paper. With

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the slip he had offered no fabulous prophecies but, what was more important to all concerned, nothing disastrous on the horizon. The child could reasonably be expected to grow and enjoy the Five Blessings — health, wealth, love, old age, and a natural death.

When my mother had occasionally spoken to us of those early years in Peking and Tientsin, her stories seemed of



another world, completely separate from the years that followed, until one day I described to her certain incidents remembered as dreams. She told me they had really happened.

For a brief moment, not long after the fortune-telling, there had been reason to doubt the comforting prophecy. In the courtyard of our home in Peking my brother one day showed me a glittering chandelier drop that he had somehow managed to acquire. Sharp flashes of light and many colours flew out of the piece of glass as he turned it in the sunlight.

‘Got string too,’ he confided. ‘I’ll tie it to the drop and make it go round and round.’

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Our amah, or nurse, had slipped into the kitchen quarters to speak to her friend, the cook. We were alone in the middle of the paved court, although all around us could be heard the chatter and noises of the household indoors. Of that courtyard in Peking I can remember only sunlight and spaciousness enclosed by a row of closed latticed windows all of which is not unusual and can be said of a great many houses in that beautiful city. All I know now about that house is that it was part of an old palace in Peking. We lived there until my father went abroad. The incident of the chandelier drop, however, is very clear, probably because it involved great wonder culminating in a big shock.

Gor-gor, or Elder Brother, tied knot after knot around the end of the chandelier drop. Then he placed himself in the middle of the yard.

'Stand over there,' he commanded, and began to turn slowly on his heels, round and round, faster and faster, letting the string stretch out with the drop on the end of it. Round and round he whirled until he looked like a top. Something, however, was missing. Instead of more flashes of red, yellow, green, and blue from the drop, it seemed to have completely vanished. Perhaps if I looked more closely I should find it again. I edged nearer the spinning figure of Gor-gor, who was shouting: 'Look! Look!' Still no drop, and now not even the string was visible. I moved a little nearer. Wham! I was lying on the ground; my left cheek hurt; and red spots were dripping on my pink jacket.

'Mai-mai, Mai-mai! — Little sister, little sister!' Gor-gor kept saying over and over again as he stood staring at me. His eyes looked as if they were going to jump out of his head.

There were many more spots of red on the jacket and my face seemed to be covered with the red too. Gor-gor looked frightened. I was frightened. And where was Amah?

'Amah! Amah! A . . . mah!' I bawled. The more I cried,

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the more my cheek hurt. The gatekeeper, servants, relatives, and Amah came running from all directions making a lot of noise. Amah waddled like a duck with her feet flat and turned out, like a duck dressed in a blue jacket and black trousers. She got a severe scolding after the incident of the chandelier drop. A daughter disfigured would have been a burden indeed.

When my father was sent to Europe as a member of a mission, we went to my mother's mother in Tientsin. I remember the house so well that I could draw a plan of it. As one came in at the gate, the two doors of which were always closed and only a small door in one of them used, the gatekeeper's room was immediately on the right. The courtyard was rectangular and open. Bath houses and servants' quarters stood to the left of the gate, and at the opposite end of the yard were the family quarters behind which was a smaller yard, or enclosed garden, leading to a larger garden and the vineyards. On the left side of the courtyard was a long low wing comprising a small study and a long room full of books and pictures. As I remember it, a wall ran along the opposite side to this library wing. Nothing happened on that side to give cause to remember it other than as a wall; there may have been some other rooms.

On warm nights the adults sat in the small garden, sipping tea and eating pomegranates and dried watermelon seeds. Hundreds of stars filled the sky. The dwarf trees in the large pots in the garden twisted more gently in the dimness. Along the bottom of the wall there were rows of jasmine bushes and, at their feet, clusters of lily of the valley, my grandmother's favourite flower. The jasmine bush is really a small tree whose fragrant white blossoms open only at twilight. On hot evenings their scent was heavy in the night air.

Invariably, on these evenings, my grandmother went

inside to return with a saucer and a little water in it. Walking slowly around the garden, she picked the jasmine blossoms one by one until there were quite a number floating in the saucer. One or two she put in her hair, just behind her ear, so that she could smell their fragrance as she moved. Her fingers touched the flowers as if she were afraid to leave a mark on their whiteness.

Gor-gor and I were allowed to loiter around the chatting group and occasionally we were given a nibble of pomegranate, a fruit which looks far more beautiful than it tastes. The seeds, resembling rubies, pucker one's mouth with sourness; their hard kernels stick in the teeth and are not easy to swallow. Once in a while, we would hear the call of a street vendor outside the gate and beg for some of his wares. The gatekeeper was sent to buy some for us — candy like jelly beans, and nuts which had been shelled and salted.

Most Chinese children share with the adults what they may happen to be eating. I don't think it entered anyone's head that we should have a special diet or that there were things we should not eat because they were too rich or too fat. The only word of caution was not to eat too much: and if we did, we very soon learned to proceed more moderately. Cow's milk is so scarce in China that few Chinese ever drink it. We never tasted cow's milk until we went to England, when it violently disagreed with us.

Gor-gor and I took notice of De-de, or Younger Brother, who was a baby, after he had a violent attack of indigestion. For what seemed a long time, this collapse was to us the only distinctive thing about our little brother. A well-meaning servant gave him a mouthful of overripe banana and the effects were almost fatal. De-de was then considered a delicate child until some years later, on going to a boarding school in England, he turned out to be as tough as any of his schoolfellows. This might have been due to the Spartan



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regime in an English school, or it might have been because De-de resembled our father; he was the pet of the family and never had to assert himself until he faced the competition of a boarding school.

The servant who gave De-de the mouthful of banana was tragically the victim of a dreadful accident. One evening while we were in the garden, a shout broke the peaceful atmosphere; other voices joined in the shouting and it was evident that something was wrong. Some of the people in the garden got up from their chairs to go and see what had happened. I held fast to Amah's hand and we followed them.

The yard was full of running people silhouetted against flames which were rising from the bath house at the end of the yard. The sky above seemed very black. Someone kicked open a door and we had a glimpse of a doorway full of flames. Men with buckets of water put out the fire. Everyone was crying: 'Ayah! Ayah!' Amah was speechless with awe.

It turned out that the servant had been in a bathtub and had fainted from the fumes of the charcoal burner used to heat the water. He had knocked over the burner and set the little room on fire. The gap made a big black hole in the wall for several days until men came with bricks and wood, and rebuilt it.

There was a little *mu tsai*, or servant girl, of about fourteen, who looked after me when my amah was otherwise occupied. I do not know how long this *mu tsai* had been with us but she seemed to have no other ties. While the other members of the household all had families, this one never spoke of parents or brothers or sisters. They tell me that she took wonderful care of me. They tell me, too, that she had an enormous appetite; in fact, the other servants called her *lap-sap-toong*, the equivalent of garbage can. I remember her

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as a cheerful person. I think, however, that she must have been given to sudden impulses, and extreme jubilation alternating with deep depressions.

One day, late in the afternoon, we came out of the library where we had been playing on the thick carpet, jumping



from one part of the blue pattern to another. A bat flew past. We whooped. At least, the *mu tsai* whooped and I echoed. We jumped up and down and whooped again. Suddenly she took off her slipper and threw it with all her might at the bat. The bat flew unconcernedly over the roof and after it soared the slipper.

‘Well, there it goes,’ the *mu tsai* sighed. ‘Now I have only one shoe in the world.’

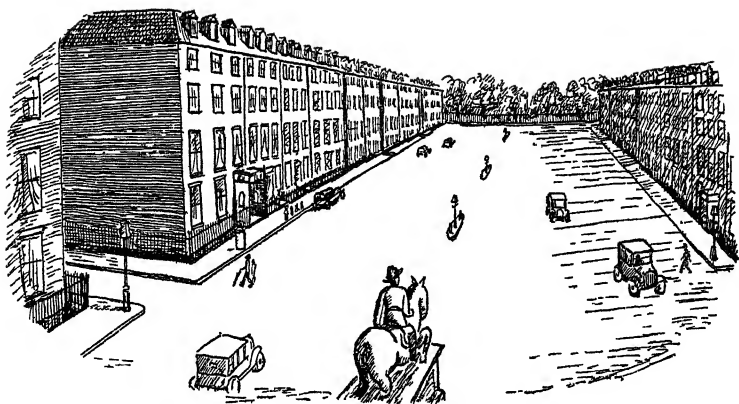
It was this *mu tsai* who used to sing a mournful little song, an old Pekingese rhyme, which went something like this:

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'I feel like the head of a little withered cabbage,  
Yellow and dry on the ground.  
My mother died and left me so many years ago.  
My father I am afraid will marry again.  
My father — he has married again!  
And now I have a new little brother,  
A brother who gets all the good things to eat,  
And I only the gravy to pour on my rice.  
Oh! if only my mother were here.  
I weep for my mother who is dead.  
I feel like the head of a little withered cabbage.'

I wonder what she would have said had she known that by chance she stood in one of the photographs on my aunt's wall. There she was, a member of the family groups, grinning in the background of a picture taken in Tientsin. If she really had been an orphan and alone in the world, she had certainly picked a clan large enough to make up for her loss, and would remain among them at least as long as my aunt so recorded our growth.

Underneath that particular photograph were two small pictures, one of my brothers and me taken in Shanghai just before we sailed for England, and the other of us, standing in the same positions except that De-de and I were clutching hands, taken shortly after we had arrived in London and in our first foreign clothes. That was the beginning of an unexpected and thorough change in our way of living.



## CHAPTER II

### TO LONDON AND POINTS WEST

BY order of the Republic of China my father was appointed to London and thus, by chance, I became an English child. Papa was sent to London as Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to the Court of St. James. I did not know about this title for some time; when I did, it sounded as good as anything in the *Blue Fairy Book*.

The voyage to England in 1914 was not as eventful as might have been expected after the declaration of war on Europe. We were aboard a Japanese steamer, the *Nippon Yusen Kaisha*, and the letters in this name were the first English letters we learned to decipher. It was not till we had proceeded through the Suez Canal and into the Mediterranean Sea that we met any signs of war. Somewhere in the blue waters of the Mediterranean the *Nippon Yusen Kaisha* was ordered to retrace her previous day's course, and to carry a contingent of British soldiers. Their destination must have been Gallipoli. Not speaking a word of English,

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we three children had a wonderful time with the soldiers, who fed us Nestlé's milk chocolate in bars wrapped in crackly silver paper.

Mamma, or Mm-mah as we called her, did not speak English; and when we arrived in London she had a teacher in the same way as we had a governess. Mm-mah had to copy long English poems into a black exercise book which she later gave to me with apparent relief. It is curious that her teacher seemed to think that 'The Village Blacksmith' and poems ringing with British patriotism should be the most useful means to teach a Chinese lady to master the English language. She eventually spoke English fluently and faltered only when people thought they could make understanding easier by shouting at her. It was rather rude and very thoughtless of them. Why should foreigners be considered deaf if at times they give the appearance of being dumb?

Our governess was a tall blonde English woman by the name of Miss Bendall, who for no good reason was called Miss Dando by all of us. She had extraordinary feet, very long and very thin. When Gor-gor and I learned about naval battles from newspaper pictures, we laid out elaborate naval manoeuvres on the nursery floor, using whatever shoes we could lay our hands on. Miss Dando's shoes always served as the dreadnoughts of His Majesty's fleet, my father's neat and smaller shoes as destroyers, and my mother's slim slippers as submarines.

We lived in London in a tall house in Portland Place, that straight and beautiful avenue with Park Crescent at one end, exclusive within its black spiked railings, and Langham Hotel at the other. Portland Place was wider than three average streets, and down the centre sooty equestrian statues were lined up at intervals. Lord Roberts guarded our corner. He sat astride his stalwart steed sometimes wet

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and blacker than usual, sometimes grey with dust and heat, but always with an unflinching British look far into the distance.

Our house was the colour of butterscotch, a dreadful colour for a house, but inside it was a very fine place. In fact, not only were its five floors and basement Chinese territory (because the Chinese Government had taken it on a 99-year lease), but 49 Portland Place definitely had an air with its high ceilings and chandeliers, and beautiful Adam doors and mantelpieces. It was also a historic spot. In a small attic room Sun Yat-sen, 'Father of the Chinese Republic', had been imprisoned in 1896.

Sun Yat-sen was in exile at that time because he believed in the revolutionary cause in China. He had fled to America and Europe from the Manchu Government which had set a price on his head. The Manchus ruled over China for over three hundred years, long enough for any line of rulers to deteriorate as they were doing in 1896. Sun Yat-sen was one of a small group of Cantonese who were determined to make China into a republic and build her into a modern nation. Several attempts had been made and failed. It was after one of these uprisings against the Manchu Government in Peking that Sun Yat-sen had fled to England. He was captured in London by imperial agents and locked up in an attic in the Legation which, at that time, represented the Manchu regime. He was kept in the Legation attic to await being shipped back to China. If these plans had been carried out, Sun Yat-sen would probably have been executed and the Republic of China might not have come into being for many more years.

The room on the top floor of the Legation was square, low-ceilinged, and dirty. It had a tiny fireplace which indirectly was the means of effecting his release. Sun Yat-sen managed to persuade an English servant, who brought

coal for the fire, to take a note to Dr. James Cantlie. Dr. Cantlie lived round the corner in Harley Street. He and Mrs. Cantlie had lived and worked in China and had a great many Chinese friends, among them Sun Yat-sen.

There is some question as to whether a note was taken out in the coal scuttle or the servant was given a verbal message, writing the note afterwards to Dr. Cantlie. Long after, the Cantlies' nanny told me that one evening there had been a ring at the door and, when she went to open it, no one was there but a note had been slipped into the letter box.

'My word!' Nanny said. 'There *was* a to-do. Scotland Yard and all. But the Doctor and Missus got him out. My! it took some doing you may be sure!'

We used to hear a lot about Sun Yat-sen when we lived in London because every time we misbehaved, our amah would say: 'I'll tell Sun Yat-sen's ghost about you!' Not a friendly thing to say, but most nurses have a way of resurrecting a boggy to help them. The remarkable difference between these nurses and our amah was that she, half expecting the ghost to materialize, would look furtively over her shoulder. Gor-gor once said to her after she had evoked the help of the ghost in a dark hall: 'Look, there it is!' Whereupon we all turned on our heels and fled into the nursery.

The amah, or Yaomah as we called her because her surname was Yao, was De-de's nurse. Consequently, and quite rightly, he was the most important living thing in the world to her. Gor-gor and I were merely the older brother and sister and had to be supervised in our washing, eating, and general behaviour. De-de however, was the one, who got the extra spoonful of sugar at teatime, the soap that smelled nicest in his bath, and Pond's Vanishing Cream on his face and hands.

Our nursery bathroom was unique. It was a large room

with a long bath and basin in one quarter, leaving the rest of the room empty and open for all sorts of games. In the farthest corner, in a little room by itself was what the British call the W.C.; or, as the French call it, *le cabinet*; or as others call it in America, the toilet, which doesn't make much sense. We were puzzled by the discreetness of calling it the W.C., especially when we found out that a whole section of the city of London was also called W.C. with 1, 2 and 3, added. The bathroom also had a fireplace and a cuckoo clock. The empty space was soon filled with a punching bag, a rocking horse, and various toys, including a network of railway and toy trains in which Yaomah would constantly get entangled. She never failed to put her foot into Clapham Junction.

The house, according to the pattern of English houses of that period, was divided into front and back sections, the front being formal, the hallways and staircase carpeted in dark green. The back part was on a smaller scale; the stairs, winding round and round in tight squares with dark corners which were useful in games of hide-and-seek, were laid with a rough brown matting striped in dark red and black, serviceable and appropriate for the servants and children.

The front hall of the house was cavernous. So dark was it, that the light on the porter's desk in the corner was always lit. Golding, the porter, wore a uniform of black trousers and a coat with tails, and a resplendent scarlet waistcoat with gold buttons, the only bright spots in his gloomy domain. Golding's figure could have been described as portly; he had a rosy face and thin sandy hair and moustache to match. He was not communicative about anything except the weather. The conditions of the weather would move him to terse reports: 'Cloudin' hup a bit,' 'Clearin' awlright,' or as personal a tip as 'Better take your 'brolly along'.

When Golding retired, he was succeeded by a much younger man by the name of Alfred Stevenson. Everyone



winned a bit when the other servants shouted for 'II' Alfred!' because that happened to be Papa's English name. The cook by some unwritten household law was always known as Mrs. So-and-So, and we had many Mrs. So-and-So's in the course of the years, while the maids were called by their first names. Due to the liking of this English class for names like Violet and Daisy, there were periods when our house seemed like a flower garden.

The houseman, Fred, who was with us all the years we were in London, and who may still be there in Portland Place, was a morose man with a drooping grey moustache and iron grey hair. He always wore a dark blue uniform buttoned to the neck, on the left breast of which were sewn a row of ribbons, the medals he had won before tackling the plumbing and odd jobs of the Chinese Legation. Fred, in other circumstances, would have made a fine figure of a statesman or an empire-builder in the great tradition. He had dignity and big silences which could be read to mean portentous decisions. We held him in great respect.

Gor-gor and I spent many moments hanging around the desks of the secretaries on the ground floor where also were the waiting room and other premises given over to the business of the Legation. On the floor above were the drawing room, the large dining room on the long table of which we indulged in belly slides of breathless length, a smoking room, and a small dining room where we usually had our meals. We lived on the floor above this one, and over us were the single rooms of the secretaries, lonely men whose wives and children had been left in China.

One tall thin secretary dabbled in his spare time in chemistry. We thought his table of instruments and bottles the most fascinating spot in the house. We also thought very highly of him when he managed to procure a large container of some kind of air called gas. From this container we filled

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toy balloons which miraculously floated up to the ceiling, drifting there in gay formation. This astonishing feat turned our world upside down in more senses than one. First, there was posed the enormous question of how the balloons could stay up. Secondly, we had to erect precarious elevations of tables, chairs, stools, and books to rescue balloons which had not been tied with long enough string. We took several of them each day to the park and lost a great many, some entangling in trees and others gently floating into oblivion higher and higher into the sky. This posed the third question for speculation. Where did the balloons go?

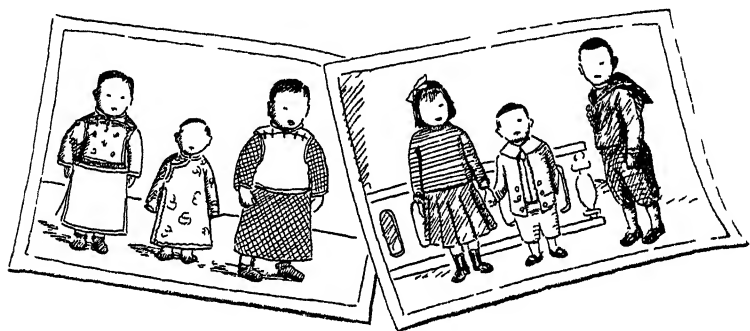
My favourite part of the Legation was the basement, that underworld ruled by Cook which resembled miniature catacombs, dark and damp except for the kitchen and scullery which winged off in the back of the house and were topped by an enormous skylight. Down here the charwomen came at half past eleven every morning for their cup of tea and a chat; down here Fred had his room full of tools, odd pieces of furniture, and a bed; and down here I heard the first stories in English from Kitty, the kitchen maid from Ireland.

Kitty had a harelip. She told me Irish tales in a chant, and the nasal tones due to her lip added to the strange quality of her voice. I believed that the harelip was a sign of her magic gift of story-telling. As I hardly knew any English when Kitty first started to tell her stories of leprechauns and saints, and the tender tale of Deirdre of the Sorrows, Kitty led me to a great discovery: the importance of how a thing is said and that, when one believed deeply in whatever one said, the magic could be projected. It was not that I could put this realization into words but that the tone and rhythm of Kitty's voice sounded different and more convincing than anything I had ever heard. She encouraged me to marvel, and to listen for the sounds of the strange and the wonderful.

Kitty was the only person in the household who thought

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well of my first English outfit. After we had been in England about a year we were put into English clothes. We had already been put on the routine of English children, which we did not mind except for that habit of early supper of milk, and bread and butter, while there was still daylight. We had long been accustomed, at least Gor-gor and I were, to having dinner with our parents and staying up late.



Gor-gor was a year and a half older and, up to the time we went to England, we were dressed in similar outfits of Chinese gowns, or jackets and pants. When we began to dress as English children, we eyed each other with some disparagement.

'That's a silly hat!' Gor-gor remarked. And he was right, for the bonnet did look silly, but I could not admit it.

'That's a silly collar!' I rejoined. And he knew that the hard Eton collar was ridiculous. When, later on, Gor-gor had to wear a top hat in his school uniform and I had to don long black stockings in my school uniform, there was cause for hilarious insults.

The housekeeper, who helped my mother run the Legation, was a severe personage by the name of Mrs. Clifford. She was responsible for my first English clothes, that awful hat, dress, and coat of purple velveteen with blotches of

embroidered pansies on the lapels and on the bosom of the dress. It was Mrs. Clifford who took me to a big shop and bought a strange assortment of jerseys, skirts, socks, and shoes. With the new outfits it was necessary to change all my underwear which, up to then, had been made of soft Chinese silk. Now I had to wear woollen combinations that chafed remorselessly until I had worn them a day or so; then, a clean pair promptly renewed the torment. In those days English girls wore a strange waistcoat over their combinations; they were called 'stays', perhaps because with numerous buttons they anchored a pair of pants, or, as they were called, drawers. Boarding school later prescribed serge bloomers to be worn over these drawers, making me feel like a spider, fat around my middle and hideous in the regulation black stockings.

Kitty assured me that my new clothes were 'grand as a lady's'. It was the only time I could not believe her. It was my first experience with a hat, and the purple velvet one weighed my spirits to depths of gloom. Wherever I had that outfit on, I took to standing around with a long face and in awkward poses.

'What's the matter, Mai-mai?' my mother would ask.

A wriggle and a pout were the only answer.

'Do you want to go to the bathroom?' Yaomah asked solicitously, adding insult to martyrdom.

A more vehement wriggle settled that query.

'Run along and play with Gor-gor,' my mother suggested. 'He's sticking stamps in his album. He'll need your help,' she added, trying to dismiss me in this cunning manner.

The conversation, as most of our conversations were at home, was made in the Cantonese dialect. In China our family had spoken Cantonese, and the dialects of Peking and Shanghai. My mother's family were originally from Canton, and although they had long been living in the north Can-

tonese was still used in their household. As we lived in Peking and Tientsin, we naturally also learned the northern dialect. And my father's family home being near Shanghai, we spoke the Shanghai dialect too. On going abroad, we continued to speak Cantonese at home but we children soon forgot most of the Peking and Shanghai dialects that we had known, a mistake not felt till much later, especially when the dialect of Peking, or Peiping as it was later renamed, was established as *Kuo Yu*, the national language.

While dialects vary all over China, and some are so different from others that they sound like another language, and others sound vaguely like distorted versions of the same language, the written word in China is the same throughout the country. In and around Canton there are several versions of Cantonese. When people from Canton meet, there is usually a friendly exchange of giggles and gesticulation, with cries of recognition while each locates by the accent the home district of the other. Chinese from other parts of the country frequently remark that a Cantonese conversation sounds like a quarrel, even when we pass comment on the weather, because we make so much noise over it.

Most families in China, if the parents come from different parts of the land, speak the father's dialect and follow the customs of his village or community. It was probably the circumstance of Papa being away in Europe and other parts of China while we were babies that led us to concentrate on our mother's dialect. It became a habit that persisted even after we went abroad, and Papa spoke Cantonese with us as the path of least resistance.

'I don't want to stick stamps,' I told Mm-mah when she tried to guide my mind off my uncomfortable foreign clothes.

'Well, take off your hat and coat, and hang them up in the cupboard.' I went willingly to do so. We had been in the park and the whole afternoon had been ruined by the

clothes. If Mm-mah would play with me, that would make up for the wasted afternoon. I went to the big table in the middle of the nursery and opened my drawer, the one in the middle, and rummaged for some paper I had saved.

The three drawers in the nursery table were the only private space we had; it was understood that no one could look into the other's cache. When we each looked over shoulders to catch a glimpse of the contents, many defiant glares were flung between us. De-de's drawer was obviously full of rubbish. Gor-gor's drawer was jammed full with pictures of ships and guns cut out from the papers, string and screws filched from Fred, pencils and crayons. I collected paper, ribbons, pebbles picked up in the park, and a few odd nuts. The nuts I liked for their texture and the shape of their shells. A great deal of time was spent in polishing them. The Brazil nut did not respond to rubbing and I concluded that it was like the skin of the elephant in the zoo, and would always look like that. The hazelnut polished up beautifully, and also the chestnut; but the almond and peanut could be admired only for their shapes. A walnut was my favourite, although there were two small walnuts brought from China whose quality surpassed all of them in the drawer.

In China a pair of walnuts is often kept for years, and now and then held in one hand and juggled, the point being to rotate them in the hand without allowing one nut to touch the other. Not only did the walnuts take on a rich patina but the manipulation made the fingers very nimble. I once saw a pair of double walnuts, deep red in colour and gnarled like a root, which had belonged to an emperor of China. The walnuts were in a glass case because the person who owned them was more concerned with the emperor than with the walnuts. This was a pity. Such walnuts need the warmth of a palm and constant care to keep their beauty.

After I had gathered several sheets of clean paper, I went to look for Yaomah's scissors.

'Will you make birds and people?' I asked Mm-mah, handing her the paper and scissors. Mm-mah had long quick fingers which were able to fold and transform a sheet of paper into a bird whose wings flapped when its tail was pulled, or a man who could stand, or strange trees whose fruit we would name as we flipped them gently, for they could be made to swing on the branch. And Mm-mah could also fold and shape a piece of paper into a square box. With great care we blew up the folded square until a perfect cube was formed. There was no way to tell how it opened or was made.

Miss Dando used to be just as absorbed as we were over the things which Mm-mah made out of paper. Her admiration rippled in a characteristic comment: 'How frightfully clever, Madame!'

One day Miss Dando talked about a day, a holiday, a holy day, which would be coming in a few weeks, called Christmas.

'It's the birthday of Jesus Christ,' she explained. 'He was born a long time ago in this country.' She pointed to a pink spot on the map on the wall. 'Here we are in London.' She indicated a dot on another pink spot. 'And here' — her arm swept over the map — 'is China.' China was yellow and had a round hump.

'*Tsung-gok, ah!*' Gor-gor nudged me, saying China in Cantonese. 'The pink spot is England, you see. All that blue part is sea. Look what a lot of sea between England and China. And all those countries besides . . .'

'No Chinese now, Simmy,' Miss Dando interrupted. It was her version of his name Szeming, the *ming* meaning bright or shining. She told us about Bethlehem, the Wise Men, and the Shepherds. I thought it a fine story but not up

## TO LONDON AND POINTS WEST

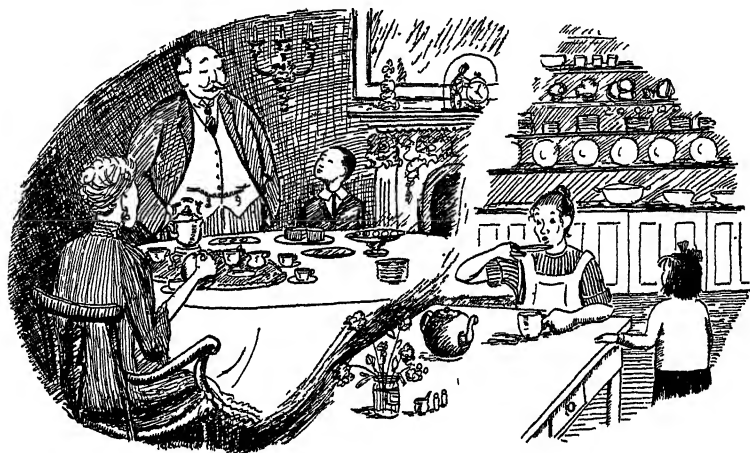
to Kitty's tales. Miss Dando showed us several pictures of Jesus in the stable. I was surprised the baby was so pink.

'What's that?' Gor-gor asked, pointing at the yellow ring around the baby's head. 'A hat?'

'A halo. That is a holy sign.'

'What's holy?'

'Jesus was the Son of God. God is holy. Jesus is holy.'



'Is that his father?' We pointed to the man in a purple dress.

'No. That is one of the Wise Men. This is Joseph, the father.' Miss Dando indicated a man in the corner who looked very lonely.

'Mr. God?'

'No. His name was Joseph. Jesus is called the Son of God because He was a good man and God sent Him down to us to save us.'

'Oh.'

The personality of 'Mr. God' was further complicated by the revelation of Santa Claus, whose main activity at this time of year seemed to be in dropping down chimneys with



a bag over his shoulder. His face was rather like some old gentlemen in pictures in China, although the clothes he wore were unique. In fact, the only clear picture we had of God was that of an old gentleman.

Among the presents of this first Christmas were three red cardboard boxes of jigsaw puzzles from Sir Adolph and Lady Tuck. We soon learned to spell out the name which sprawled across the top of each box – ‘Raphael Tuck and Sons, Ltd. By Appointment to H.M. King George the Fifth.’ Sir Adolph was a nice old gentleman with a fine white moustache. He patted our heads and smiled down at us as he jingled the coins in his pockets, but never said much. It was not altogether clear how Sir Adolph could be ‘Raphael Tuck & Sons’ as we had been told. Explanations, however, seemed superfluous when large parcels arrived full of puzzles, picture books, flowery calendars, and post-cards of horses, dogs, sailing ships, and portraits of the royal family. Sir Adolph’s bounty knew no limits. Much to our joy, when later we paid a farewell call to the Tucks before going off to boarding school, a golden sovereign was bestowed on each of us by that generous man.

On the wall of the big room in which we used to have tea in the Tucks’ home, there hung an enormous oil painting of their family, when they had been children. It was a dark picture. The few touches of white in the boys’ collars and the white of the girls’ dresses looked very clean indeed.

‘That’s Sybil,’ Lady Tuck said, pointing to a dark-haired girl with big brown eyes in the picture. ‘Would you know her, m’dears?’ We looked intently at the girl in the picture and turned to gaze at the lady on the sofa, who laughed softly at us. The big brown eyes were certainly the same eyes, and the hair was the same colour though in the picture a large blue bow sat on top of her head, but nothing else seemed to

coincide. It seemed best not to say anything. There was no need to. Lady Tuck had a way of leading the conversation with her gentle drawling phrases and answering her own questions.

'And that's Dezzy. You haven't met my Dezzy yet? No. Handsome fellow, Dezzy. And that's Reggie over there bein' so grown up. Droll one, Reggie. Have another piece of cake?'

We each accepted a second piece of cake. Muriel, the youngest daughter, came in with Mamzelle. Muriel had a little black dog which yapped at us when we gingerly tried to pat it.

'He won't bite you, m'darlin',' Lady Tuck reassured me. Instinct told me to be careful, so I edged over to the sofa to sit between Sybil and Muriel.

'Have you been playing in the park?' Muriel asked politely. She was grown up by our standards, with her hair in a knot like Miss Dando, but the fact that she had a Mamzelle made her seem closer than Sybil. She and her sister talked very fast in French to Mamzelle; the sounds trickled like the fountain in Regent's Park. I always wanted to drink from that fountain, out of one of the iron cups chained to the fountain, as other people were doing, but Miss Dando always anticipated my move. 'Germs!' was her only explanation.

Something in the French conversation on the sofa attracted Lady Tuck's attention.

'Of course, m'darlin',' she interrupted Muriel. 'You can stay with me at the Hall, and Sybil can take Mamzelle to help her.' Turning to me, she continued: 'And, ducky, you must come and help me. We'll get you an elephant and put money boxes on his back, shall we? Yes, that's what we'll do. You must put on your best bonnet, m'darlin', and help me to sell a lot of Alexandra roses.'

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'She hasn't the foggiest notion what you are talking about, Mother,' Sybil said from her corner of the sofa.

'Of course not, m'dear. You don't know what your old friend is chatterin' about, do you, ducky? Why should you? But I'm sure your mother will let you come. I'm sure you'll like the elephant. And you shall meet Queen Alexandra!'

'Oh, Mother!' Sybil protested mildly.

'Don't be silly, m'darlin'. We're goin' to have a lot of fun.' That settled it. I was agog over the elephant and imagined long hours of rides on it similar to the elephant rides each Sunday afternoon at the zoo with Papa.

The elephant was a disappointment. It was big, to be sure, but it was stuffed and stiff on wheels. True to Lady Tuck's words, two boxes were strapped on the red saddle on its grey back. With a basket of pink paper roses in the left hand, I was instructed to push the elephant with my right from one side of the doorway to the other. The hall of the building was crowded with ladies in big hats, each with a basket and a tin in their hands. Lady Tuck seemed to be the leader; when each lady went up to her to ask questions, she nodded and called everybody 'm'dear'.

In the middle of the afternoon, the ladies came back and stood around straightening their dresses and hats.

'Here she is!' someone behind me said excitedly. A carriage drove up and a frail lady in grey stepped out slowly and came along the carpet on the sidewalk. Lady Tuck and some of the ladies greeted her, bobbing down and up in little curtsies. It was the King's mother. Miss Dando had showed us pictures of her, always in a carriage like the one standing now in front of the door.

As she came through the doorway, the lady stopped in front of me and smiled. For a moment I looked up into the gentlest, most beautiful face I had ever seen. I had only time to put one foot behind the other, but not to curtsy as

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Lady Tuck had earlier demonstrated. The lady leaned over and patted me. A soft scent wafted me to heights of adoration. I was visited by a firm conviction that all beautiful ladies should wear grey and smell faintly of lavender.

I imparted this Edwardian concept to Kitty at the first opportunity.

'Sure! She's a lovely lady, God bless 'er!' Kitty agreed fervently with me. 'Patted you, did she now? Now, there's something to remember to tell your grandchildren!'

I could not help comparing Queen Alexandra in soft grey and holding a parasol with Kitty, as she stood there that Thursday afternoon ready to go out. It was her afternoon off. Kitty had on a dark blue dress and a flat dark hat on which reposed a rather tired feather. In her hand she held her 'gamp', as Cook called it. It was a clumsy black umbrella with a long hooked handle.

'Oh, Kitty!' I sighed. I was torn by a feeling of disloyalty, for I dearly loved Kitty and expected her to be perfect. I could not know then that she was perfect in her own extraordinary way.

'Where are you going, Kitty?' I asked to change the subject.

'Depends on me fancy!'

'Can I go too?'

'Lawks, no! What would Madame say? And what would Old Mah say?' Kitty called Yaomah 'Ole Mah'.

'Why not? Oh, *please*, Kitty!'

'Ye'll be learnin' that the likes of ye don't go gaddin' with the likes of Kitty. T'ain't proper-like, if ye know what I mean.'

'Oh.' There was a note of emphasis in her voice which brooked no pleading.

'There's a love now, don't go pullin' a long face on Kitty. I arsk ye, can't go around bein' patted on the 'ead by 'Er

Majesty one day and goin' on a thruppenny bus ride with Kitty the next, now, can ye? Ye'll be learnin' soon enough, m'love, what's what.'

The complications of social levels and titles in England came up again when Dr. Cantlie, the man who had helped Sun Yat-sen to escape, was made a 'Sir' for his work in organizing the ambulance corps in the British army. In the course of the explanation by Miss Dando as to how a person became a 'Sir' and his wife a 'Lady', we learned a substantial hunk of English history and legend, and were particularly carried away into realms of fantasy by the story of King Arthur and his Round Table. Gor-gor by now was away at school. De-de and I played more often together, and the game of knights riding at breakneck speed completely absorbed our hours until Gor-gor came home for the holidays.

'What a silly game!' he commented.

'It's better than battleships,' I retorted.

'Better than battleships,' De-de echoed faintly.

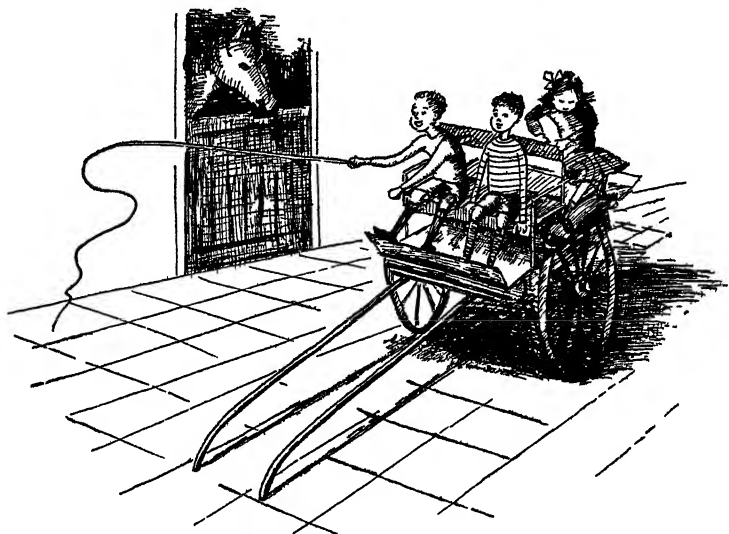
'Oh, rot!' Gor-gor dismissed the subject from further consideration. School had taught him a fund of new expressions and a disdain for young no-'counts like us. Furthermore, he took to addressing Papa with a 'Yes, sir!' and a 'No, sir!' and a 'Do you really think so, sir?' in an officious way which left us gasping. It might have been all right at school, and even to Sir Adolph, but mixed in with Chinese sentences it caused embarrassing pauses until we finally got used to it. I think even Papa was a bit surprised at what an English school had done to Gor-gor.

'Your son is now an English boy,' Mm-mah said quietly.

'It must be so,' Papa replied. 'The children must have a good education. I want even the girl to have the same kind of education as her brothers.'

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They talked about sending me to a boarding school, partly for the formal education that Papa had ordained and partly because the air raids over London were increasing in number and volume. My age and inadequate English postponed this step for a little while, and I was sent instead to Miss Dando's sister in the country. The sister's husband



was a clergyman. He and his wife and two little boys lived at the Vicarage, a square red-brick house covered with thick ivy. It was a strange new routine and I was desperately homesick, but the two little boys, Mark and Derek, soon dispelled the feeling of being lost. They planned a dozen new games to play every day when we had finished our lessons in the dining-room.

One day Mark spied the two-wheeled cart in the yard, standing empty with its shafts on the cobblestones. He suggested that we should get on and play carriages. It was a lot of fun as we took turns sitting in the driver's seat, flourishing the long whip. As it was the turn of the boys to sit in the

front seat, I climbed from the rear on to the part which curved over the wheel. By hooking my foot under the end I stayed on this precarious perch.

'Whoa!' shouted Mark to the imaginary steed. 'Now you can drive,' he said to Derek, handing him the invisible reins. They changed seats, while I remained on the guard.

'All aboard!' Derek yelled, mixing his terms. 'Giddap!' We were off on a whirlwind, jiggling up and down in our giddy ride. Suddenly I began to slip.

'Stop!' I cried. It was too late and I fell off. My left arm hurt painfully.

The doctor's office to which we hurried was a marvellous place. I loved the smell of it and the glass case with shining instruments and bottles in it. He looked very serious until he had done a lot of things to the arm and made it feel four times as big. Then he joked and talked, showing me some of the things in his cabinet, and let me sit in his chair which could swirl from side to side.

I left the Vicarage as reluctantly as I had come to it. Yao-mah scolded me about my arm, but the worst part about coming home was finding Mm-mah gone.

'Where's Mm-mah?' I asked Yaomah impatiently, interrupting the lecture on playing such silly games that I broke arms and gave people a lot of trouble.

'What must those people have thought of you, giving so much trouble? Your mother has gone back to China.'

'Alone?'

'Yes. Your mother went back to see her mother and your little sister.'

'Why?'

'Don't be silly. She wanted to see them, of course.'

I brooded over this news for some time. I knew of ships sinking when things called torpedoes struck them. I did not like the thoughts I had.

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'Why did Mm-mah go away?' I asked Papa one day.

'She wanted to see Ah Poor,' he replied. We called our grandmother Ah Poor. 'And she wanted to see your little sister.'

I had forgotten about the sister we had left in China. The decision had been made not to bring the baby with us when we came to London and she was left in Ah Poor's charge in Tientsin. Even being reminded of her existence did not make me very curious about her. I was more concerned about Mm-mah.

'Did she go on the *Nippon Yusen Kaisha*?' I asked Papa.

'No. She didn't go on a ship. She went via the Trans-Siberian Railway.'

'What's that?'

'It's a long railroad on which you can go all the way by train to China across Russia.'

'When is Mm-mah coming back?'

'Soon.'

It was clear that I was not going to find out much from Papa and I made a mental note to speak to Kitty about this long train.

'Papa,' I resumed. We called Papa the Cantonese way which sounds more like Ba-ba. 'I liked the doctor very much. Sir James is a doctor, isn't he?'

'Yes. A very fine doctor.' All this time Papa was playing a game of solitaire. He laid out the cards as he talked. 'Sir James is a surgeon, a very fine surgeon.'

'I think I'd like to be a doctor when I grow up.'

'Nonsense! Girls aren't doctors. You'll help your mother when you grow up.'

'Why can't girls be doctors?'

The entrance of a secretary saved Papa from tackling that question. It was a blow to hear that my first aspiration was



not possible. It presented something more to brood about.

It was not Kitty who enlightened me about the Trans-Siberian Railway. In fact, Kitty had never heard of it; she did not know that there was such a train to China. It was the Cantlies' nanny who told me about the Trans-Siberian Railway, and that Mm-mah probably had to take along a thermos bottle and things to eat because it was a long trip.

'The brave little thing!' was Nanny's comment. 'That's a long journey for her alone. It's the other side of the wor . r . rld.' Nanny's r's purred.

'Nanny, why can't girls be doctors?'

'What's that? Girls can't be doctors indeed! They make gr . r . rand doctors! There are women doctors and many women in the medical profession. Look at m'lady.' She was referring to Lady Cantlie, who had been a nurse and had worked with Sir James on the ambulance units.

'Papa says girls can't be doctors,' I repeated.

'Well, there are a lot of people who don't believe women make good doctors. That's what he meant.' Nanny always went straight to the point in her rather brusque way. She mumbled to herself something about stuff and nonsense, then put the sock she was darning on the top of the sewing basket with a thud of finality. 'Best be getting a cup of tea, dearie.' English and Scotch people like Nanny have the same attitude about a cup of tea as many Chinese: that the potion is a cure-all, soothing anything from a toothache to a heartache.

After tea I went upstairs to the top of the house to wait for Sir James. He used a large room with a skylight as a study and sitting-room. In it were shelves of books, worn leather armchairs, and a big double desk piled with papers, bottles of ink, pens and pencils, and a jumble of odds and ends; the drawers of the desk were in the same muddled state. A

small billiard table took up the other half of the room; scarred and nicked on its legs and sides, it had been in that room for many years as a game table for the four Cantlie sons who were now in the army and navy. Since Lady Cantlie's death, Sir James spent most of his hours at home in this room and sometimes, when I was there, we played a game of billiards. Once in a while Sir James would stop in the middle of the game to show me how to make a trick shot. Leaning over the table, gauging and contemplating, he finally made the shot across the table and proceeded with the game, alternating the balls, until with a start he remembered me: 'Dearie me, what am I doing? Your shot, of course, your shot, my dear!'

Often it was a long time before Sir James came home from the hospital. I passed the time looking at pictures in some of the big books on the bottom shelf. They were full of medical drawings, fine neat lines and complicated structures which were so well knit together. While I knew they were anatomical drawings, it seemed impossible that my arm was like that bundle of muscle, veins, bone, and tissue, or that Nanny's leg was anything resembling the drawing in front of me; and to think that all of us had all those things inside of us. It was incredible but fascinating.

I could hear Sir James' footsteps as he slowly climbed the stairs, whistling softly under his breath. After we had greeted each other, more often than not he would stretch his arms high over his head and say: 'Och! I'm ready for me tea. Ring the bell, will ye, dear?'

He always sat in a brown chair by the fireplace for his tea, and always, as if it were a ritual, he ate two slices of bread and butter with his first cup of tea, and a piece of cake with the second. On one occasion, he stopped after the first cup of tea and walked over to the desk, pulling open a drawer and rummaging in it.

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'Drat it!' he muttered. Sitting down, he began to go through the other drawers. 'A little box,' he replied when I asked him what he was looking for. 'Ye'd best tidy up a bit for me,' he suggested. 'D'ye think ye can?'

'Yes,' I replied, without knowing whether I could bring order to the chaos in those drawers. I started with the top one in the middle and spent the rest of the afternoon pulling things out and piling them on the desk, then replacing them as neatly as I could. I looked in several little boxes: round ones with pills in them, black ones full of pins, square ones bulging with rubber bands. In one drawer I found a small dark red box. I opened it and looked on an eye. It was strange seeing an eye without a face. The eye was the colour of Sir James' eyes, greenish with light brown flecks. Fine red lines marked the eye in the box as in the pictures in the anatomy books. The eye stared at me. I could not stop looking at it. I touched it to see if it would blink. It did not blink. It continued to stare. The touch of it was cold and hard.

'Is this what you were looking for?' I took the eye to Sir James, who was napping in his chair by the fireplace.

'Bless me, yes!' he said, taking it and putting it into his pocket. I looked at his eyes very carefully to see if both of them were there.

'That's me spare eye,' he explained.

'A sp . p . pare eye?'

'Aye. That's a glass eye. I only have one good eye, didn't ye know, dear?'

'It's very real,' I said finally, thinking of the glass eye. Sir James chuckled. The glass eye was a revelation to me. I had not thought of the body as anything but one piece. Perhaps many other people had glass eyes, spare eyes. It never occurred to me, however, that a glass eye could not see.

## TO LONDON AND POINTS WEST

My mother came home after what seemed a long time. London seemed a brighter place after she returned. It was, however, considered not a very safe place. The air raids were more frequent and the daylight raids had begun. When the bugle sounded the warning, we all descended to the basement, which was considered the safest spot in the house,



although later on we were instructed to remain on the ground floor, away from windows, and with screens or some kind of protection around us. Many a night we were carried downstairs wrapped in blankets. After this had happened a great many times, Papa decided to send me out of the city to boarding school.

There was an air raid the night before I went away to school. For once I was wide awake, the reason being that I had that evening put on for the first time the new night-clothes which had been bought for school. I was terribly pleased to show to the assembled household the pale blue

flannel dressing gown and slippers to match.

In spite of the ominous reason for our gathering in the basement, the changed appearance in night regalia of the members of the staff and household lent a distinctly *dégagé* note to the company. Fred, from force of habit, had put on the dark blue jacket of his uniform though the lower part of him remained in pyjama legs. Some of the secretaries wore Chinese padded gowns and did not seem so strange, but others in English dressing gowns looked very unusual. Their sombreness was relieved by the chocolate-box pink and blue of the maids' dressing gowns and the lilacs on Cook's wrapper. Two of the maids went to the kitchen to make a pot of tea and bring something to eat. It all seemed very exciting and much more fun for being impromptu. I enjoyed listening to them talking politely to each other as if they were not all rumpled up and in night attire.

'Won't you have a cup of tea?'

'Thank you. I don't mind if I do.'

'May I give you this cushion?'

'Oh, no, please don't bother!'

'Not at all. Do take it.'

'Thanks ever so much.'

'Don't mention it.'

It was like the polite games De-de and I played in the nursery. Suddenly in the middle of the tea party, there was a crash somewhere in the back of the house. Everyone perked up, listened, and looked at each other inquiringly. What could it have been, and in our house or somewhere outside? It could not be a bomb or we should not be sitting there. Fred murmured something about going to have a look around, and left us.

While he was gone, the All Clear signal sounded. We all stretched and filed out to go back to bed. Meeting Fred on the way out, we heard that two pieces of shrapnel had

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dropped through the kitchen skylight, broken two panes, fallen on to the floor and bounced, one up on a shelf and the other into a cupboard of chinaware.

'Good thing you wasn't there,' Fred said gloomily to Cook.

'Get on wi' ya! Look like you wish I was!' she retorted crossly and stalked off to bed.



### CHAPTER III

## A UNIFORM, A SPONGE, A ROSE AND A RING

THE next morning I dressed in the school uniform, dark blue sweater and skirt, black stockings and shoes, and faced the day with trepidation. I felt empty inside. What sort of place would I be sleeping in to-night? What was school? In the photograph that was duly taken and sent to my aunt in Shanghai some of this alarm was apparent.

In the early afternoon Papa and Mm-mah took me to Charing Cross Station as instructed in the letter from the school. The letter had had a heading in bold red square letters: 'CALEDONIA, COODEN, BEXHILL-ON-SEA, SUSSEX', and the neat signatures of Mabel Wynne and Alice Barker, the two heads of the school.

We made our way to the platform where the school train was waiting. The nearer we got to it, the more girls I saw

dressed exactly as I was, each clutching a small bag. Papa went up to two ladies who were busily talking to a group of nervous fathers and mothers. He beckoned me to join them. I obeyed, shook the hands of Mabel Wynne and Alice Barker, and was put into the corner seat of a railway carriage. I clung to my teddy bear, the only thing that seemed related to home. Everything in my trunk and bag, everything I was wearing from the skin out, was new. Each item had been checked on the list from school which had instructed my parents what should be packed, down to a sponge. Mm-mah had looked at the large brown lump of a sponge that seemed to be full of holes, and wondered what on earth I would do with it. Certainly I did not know, even after I was told to take it with me to the bath.

Miss Piper, the matron, who made the rounds to check our ablutions, walked in on me in the bath one day.

‘What *are* you sitting on, child?’

I edged off the sponge which I was using as a cushion and lifted it, soggy with water, to show her. She showed me how it was used. Its indispensability was never clear to me. This incident, however, was several weeks after I had settled down at school. Meanwhile, from the minute of arrival at the station a new world unfolded, full of little girls shepherded by a group of Miss Dandos.

I had never seen Papa or Mm-mah look as lost as they did on that station platform. They were as bewildered as I was at the fluttering mothers, jocular fathers, and screaming daughters. Pigtailed swung and hats fell off as the girls hugged parents around the neck in good-bye embraces. We did not kiss like that in our family. The nearest thing to a kiss was stroking the cheek, or when we were babies being smelled on the cheek. I had never thrown my arms around Papa’s neck with the abandon I watched now, nor smacked my lips on Mm-mah’s face so ferociously. I could not



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imagine how it might feel to do so. We had not even said good-bye. The three of us just looked at each other over the faces and pigtails.

A tall girl with dark long hair in curls sat down opposite me. She looked very hard at me and compared at a glance our teddy bears. Hers was under her arm, a huge honey-coloured animal with a pink ribbon around its neck. Next to that gorgeous creature my bear looked shrunken and rather hairless, but maternally I definitely preferred it so. Two other girls climbed into the carriage, one about my age and the other taller. They chatted out of the door with their mother, a lady dressed all in black with a long black veil. She had a lovely quiet voice.

I looked over at Mm-mah, thought that I did not like any part of this at all and that I did not want to go away to school. I decided to get out of the carriage and tell her, but just at that moment a guard came by telling everyone who was going to get on the train. I opened my mouth to shout at Mm-mah, but nothing came out. All the girls crowded to the windows and hid the platform from sight. A great weight seemed to push at my heart and two tears rolled down my face. The train jerked and shunted. Girls screamed: 'Good-bye, Daddy! Good-bye, Mummie!' What was it all about? Where was I going? When would I come back? Was I ever coming back? Deep inside of me everything crumbled in despair.

The younger girl, whose mother was dressed all in black, sat down next to me. She looked at me with curiosity. I looked back at her, then turned to look out of the window, for I was ashamed of crying.

'What's your name?' she asked in a squeaky voice. She had straight brown hair cut short at the shoulders and a fringe across her forehead. Her hat was pushed back on her head. Not waiting for an answer, she said: 'Mine's Airlie Campbell. Want a sweet?' She fumbled in a coat pocket and

pushed a hard sticky piece of candy into my hand. It was black with white stripes on it. I had never seen a black sweet before.

'Humbug,' Airlie explained. 'Haven't you ever had a peppermint humbug? Hi, Dulcie!' she shouted to her sister at the other end of the carriage. 'She's never had a humbug! Odds bodkins!'

I watched the houses and people outside, meditating on the gloomy aspect of sitting in a train when I might have been playing with De-de in the nursery just before tea. Leaning my forehead against the window, I wept so bitterly that a dark wet patch spread over the top of my teddy bear's head. Something pushed me. The girl opposite me was trying to prop the big honey-coloured bear with its silly pink ribbon and round shining eyes on my lap.

'Want to hold it?' she asked. The bear did feel lovely and soft. It was a big bear. I nodded and made room for it in the corner. Grateful for the friendly gesture, I pushed my bear on to her lap. She smiled and held it gingerly on her knee. We sat, holding each other's animal and looking at each other.

'Is this your first time at school?' she asked.

I nodded. 'You?'

'Yes. It's a funny feeling, isn't it? My sister's been to school for a long time. She's with the older girls. She says it's a lot of fun. Aunten says it's a lot of fun.'

'Who's Aunten?'

'Oh, my aunt. We live with her because Mummie and Daddy are in India.'

'What's your sister's name?'

'Mollie.'

'What's yours?' I continued in a spate of exhaustive questioning.

'Nonie. Or rather it's Norah Hickman. They call me Nonie.'

'Oh.'

Nonie asked me my name. And having no more to say to each other, we sat for the rest of the trip looking out of the window, occasionally glancing at each other.

It was late in the afternoon when we slowed into the station of Bexhill-on-Sea. The minute we stepped out of the train the air smelled different from London. There was a soft freshness in that sea breeze which was very soothing. The sky was clear and a deep blue, spreading upward vast and empty. We were herded along the platform by Miss Wynne and Miss Barker, assisted by three or four teachers, all counting heads over and over again. We were again counted as we climbed into the charabancs. The head in the seat ahead of me turned around and Airlie's face beamed at me.

'Did you like the humbug?'

'Yes.'

'Want another one?'

'Thank you.'

She handed me one over the back of the seat. 'My last but you can have it.' Overwhelmed by such generosity, and in the grip of shyness, I did not protest but popped the whole sweet in my mouth.

We were driving along a road which curved along the shore. In the twilight the tiny lights marked a town in the distance; and at the tip of the land which jutted out into the sea, one single light blinked and blinked. A teacher sitting near us pointed ahead.

'That's Beachy Head over there. You can see the lighthouse. And those lights at the foot are the lights of Eastbourne.'

We accepted the information respectfully in silence. In fact we were a very silent group driving up to school. Swinging through the gate and up a curving driveway, the charabancs stopped at the side of a big building. Heads were

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counted again as we filed off the buses and into the hall, past a teacher who ticked off names on a paper and gave each one a room number.

'You're in Number 12,' I was told. Where was Number 12? Number 12. Miss Dando said twelve was a dozen. 'Add one for a baker's dozen.' The matron finally led me to Number 12.

It was a long room divided into three cubicles, which could be partitioned off by pulling the white curtains bordered with red roses along the two poles across the room. Three beds stood in a row, very clean under white covers. Each cubicle was furnished with a bed, a chest of drawers, and a washstand on which were a bowl, jug, soap dish, and a jar for toothbrush and toothpaste. All the things on the washstand were decorated with garlands of pink roses. The puff, or eiderdown, on the bed was green with pink roses on it, and underneath each bed sat a chamber pot also with a ring of roses around its edge.

Airlie was in the next cubicle. We seemed destined to be next to each other. The third member of the dormitory was a stranger to both of us.

'Nice digs, eh?' Airlie said to me. I did not know what she meant but readily nodded assent, for I was glad to see her now familiar face. We stood by each other in mute comradeship through that first evening so full of strangeness and lurking anxiety for the unknown to-morrow. Airlie faced the fact of school with an air of defiance, and ate her bun and drank the mug of cocoa as if supper were a banquet. We were equally glad, however, when we were all sent off to bed with the prospect of a pause before the activity of school began the next day.

We undressed in silence. The name of the other girl in our room turned out to be Mary Hamilton. She had a pretty face, very pink and white, with blue eyes and fair hair.

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She wore a tummy band, an item which had not been on the school list, and kept it on even when she changed into her nightgown. Earlier she had unpacked two photographs and put them carefully on her dressing-table. Now she knelt beside her bed. I wondered if there was a connection. To my surprise Airlie also knelt beside her bed. I finished undressing and went to the window. A train was moving slowly from Eastbourne along the coast. It was a friendly sight and yet somehow it was also a lonely feeling to watch it. The sounds of the sea reached us but in the darkness the horizon line was lost; sky and sea were one, boundless, deep and unending.

Airlie came and stood beside me. 'Aren't you going to say your prayers?' she asked. I did not know what to answer. What was a prayer?

'I say, don't you say prayers?' Airlie asked incredulously.

'No. What's prayers?'

'Blister me!' she said under her breath. 'Didn't your mother ever teach you to pray?'

'No. Why? What do you do when you pray?'

'Our Father which art in heaven . . . and so forth. How rummy you never said prayers.'

'Why do you say prayers?'

'I've always said them. That's the way it is.'

'Oh.' We both looked out of the window.

'“The star that bids the shepherd fold, now the top of heaven doth hold”,' Airlie said softly to herself. '“And the something sweet of day, something something doth allay.”

. . . Don't you go to church?' she asked suddenly.

'No.'

'Jiminy! I say, are you a heathen?'

Before I could ask her what a heathen was, a bell clanged; a few minutes later a head popped around the door and snapped: 'Lights out and into bed!'

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Mary was already in bed with her head under the covers. Airlie and I climbed into our beds but neither of us was ready for sleep. A muffled sob came from the corner bed. Airlie and I looked at each other; not knowing what to do, we each returned to our own thoughts. The sobs continued, increasingly painful and choked. Airlie pantomimed from her bed: what to do? Leave her alone or go to her? She got out of bed and went over to Mary's bed.

'Cheer up,' Airlie whispered, patting the hump that was Mary. 'Cheer up, Mary. It isn't going to be so awful.' At a signal from her I went over and joined them.

'I think it's going to be fun — school!' Airlie said with a toss of her head as if she challenged anyone to contradict her. The sobs got thicker under the bedclothes. I had an idea and went to the window.

'Did you see the train? Look.' Airlie followed me to the window, echoing, 'Look!' No train was in sight so she added: 'There'll be another one soon. Come and watch.' There was no response whatsoever from the bed in the corner. We stood at the window, wondering what to do. The darkness outside seemed like a huge black yawn. Airlie grabbed my hand and pulled me back to the bed.

'I say, Mary,' she resumed. 'Here's a ripping poem I learned at home.' We watched the hump. Airlie proceeded:

'Old Meg she was a gypsy,  
And lived upon the moors:  
Her bed it was the brown heath turf,  
And her house was out of doors.

'Her apples were swart blackberries,  
Her currants, pods o' broom;  
Her wine was dew of the wild white rose,  
Her book a churchyard tomb.'

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Standing up, Airlie moved slowly around the room, lifting herself on tiptoe one minute, to swoop down bending her knees at the next. She glanced sidewise at the hump. Slowly Mary's head came up from under the covers, her face very red and very wet. Airlie turned on her heels lightly and continued:

'Her brothers were the craggy hills,  
Her sisters larchen trees;  
Alone with her great family  
She lived as she did please.

'No breakfast had she many a morn,  
No dinner many a noon,  
And 'stead of supper, she would stare  
Full hard against the moon.

'But every morn . . .'

'I . . . I . . . I wish I had never c . . . come,' Mary gulped. 'I told Mummie I didn't want to come to school.'

'It's our first time too,' Airlie said. 'I don't think it'll be beastly at all. Really. The girls don't seem such an awful bunch. Old Wynne can be scarific, I bet, but she can't eat us!' And so we comforted each other, hoping Airlie was right in her settled convictions.

My dreams that night were turbulent with girls scrambling over each other in a railway station, and Papa and Mm-mah standing on a little island. The train ran round and round the island. The train changed into string after string of roses, nodding their heads this way and that. And all the while the sea washed around the island and over us all, washing, washing, all over the dream and through the dream without ceasing.

At our first breakfast at school, many of us learned the table rules that we had to observe for a good many years. At

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each place sat a dish of porridge, cold and grey, in the middle of which a small island of brown sugar had sunk like a melted ha'penny; every lump of this abominable food had to be eaten, as was expected of everything else placed before



us at meals. Otherwise the remains were unappetizingly served to us at the next meal. While at table, if one wanted another piece of bread, or salt, or pepper, it was not permitted simply to ask for it; pointedly one inquired of either neighbour if she did not wish some bread, or salt, or pepper. The neighbour could be obliging and instantly ask the question in return, or be particularly obnoxious and merely answer in a polite negative. Lateness in the dining room was punished by not being able to speak a word through the meal and correct placing of cutlery, sitting positions, pulling out teachers' chairs to push them in at the right moment, contributed many nervous moments to the first few weeks.

The school regulations, to which we soon got accustomed,



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were not unlike the steps in breaking in a pony. Walking in single file through the corridors, and in crocodile formation two by two on the morning walks, and the location of each garment down to a hair ribbon in its assigned place in the chest of drawers or the cupboard, were strictly enforced. The final touch was the number which was given to each of us for identification. Mine was 22, which was soon marked on all my clothes, and boots and shoes. With little nails the two 2's were indelibly engraven on the instep of each shoe.

Airlie had difficulty in conforming to this regimentation. She had an odd walk, rising on her toes with each step, which made her bob up and down, and out of line. She also had a habit of unbuttoning her coat, letting it fly behind her with a casualness which could seem nothing but sloppiness to the teacher in charge of the walk.

The springy walk and habit of unbuttoning her coat brought admonitions a-plenty as we filed to church on the first Sunday. As she talked, Airlie moved waveringly out of line. As she walked, she was given to bursts of poetry in her squeaky voice, bits of poems she had learned that she loved for their rhythm and sound.

'Come, pensive nun, devout and pure,  
Sober, steadfast, and demure.  
All in a robe de-tum-de-tum,  
Flowing tum-de-tum-de-tum . . .

'Don't seem to remember that very well,' she murmured. Turning to me, she added brightly: 'Want to hear something else? I like this bit very much.

'But tell me, tell me! speak again,  
Thy soft response renewing, —  
What makes that ship drive on so fast?  
What is the ocean doing?'

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She beamed at me on completing the verse without any gaps. 'Nice, eh? Want to carry the prayer book for a bit?'

Before leaving for church, we had been lined up in the corridor and the matron had checked that each hat was on straight and that no bloomers were showing beneath skirts. Under each left glove was slipped a penny for the collection. Consternation reigned when it was discovered that I did not possess a prayer book and hymnal. I was told to share Airlie's that morning, and that the situation would be remedied as soon as possible.

I enjoyed the walks to church up hills and down slopes, along a road with tall hedges and ditches, past cottages with neat white curtains and rows of hollyhocks in front. We walked through a village called Little Common, and up a hill to the church, a grey stone building surrounded by a lot of stone slabs sticking out of the ground. By now Airlie assumed that everything had to be explained to me; she sat in the pew whispering with some relish about coffins, burials, and gravestones.

It was dim and chilly inside the church. Perhaps that affected even the teachers, whose usually strident voices also dropped into whispers. Airlie's prayer book was bulging with pressed flowers and ribbons frayed around the edges to make fancy bookmarks. She began showing them to me, the lifeless faded flowers among the hymns, satin ribbons marking the Collects, and pieces of taffeta in the Burial of the Dead.

I could not pay much attention to what was being said in church that first Sunday. The whole experience was new and I had no time to think, only to watch and copy what everyone else did. We had been given, as we were on every Sunday in the Winter and Easter Terms, a small piece of cinnamon tablet to suck during the service. This was pink, fiery, and delicious. We did not realize that the intent was

not to delight us but to ward off germs. Four schools took part in the service every Sunday and, judging from the number of gaps in their pews compared to ours, the cinnamon tablets may have been beneficial.

Gor-gor was a member of St. Wilfrid's, which was one of the two boys' schools participating in the service. I spotted him in a row near the front of the church. After the service, brothers and sisters were allowed to meet and walk together down the hill and through the village. I got out of the church first and waited for Gor-gor.

'Hullo,' we said simultaneously, and turned to walk side by side. It felt strange meeting under these new circumstances. Neither of us said a word. No word of home. No word of school. Yet there was so much to talk about. There was so much I wanted to ask him. It was not till we were nearing the cross-roads, where we had to part, that I turned to him and said: 'I'm awfully glad to see you. Everything at school is awfully funny. My friend is Airlie Campbell. Who's yours? Do you like school? What do you do? Do you have to kneel down by your bed and pray? Who got your prayer book for you? Why didn't you tell me about prayer books?'

Gor-gor grinned at me. He seemed like Gor-gor again and not a little English boy in an Eton suit. 'You're jolly green.' He laughed and had no time to say more as we had come to the cross-roads. 'Don't laugh,' he added quickly. 'I have to lift my hat when I leave you.' He pushed his hat a bit and got very red in the face. I ran to get into line with Airlie. I felt fine after seeing Gor-gor.

A few days later I was summoned to Miss Wynne's study down the hall; it was a pleasant room with a thick carpet and a fireplace. Miss Wynne was sitting at a desk by the window.

'Come in, dear,' she said. 'I have a prayer book and hymnal for you.' She put into my hands a fat book with a

black cover and gold on the sides. 'Shall I put your name in it?'

'Yes, please.'

Miss Wynne pinched a pair of glasses on her nose where they sat precariously and a little lopsidedly. She dipped her pen in an ink bottle. 'Let's see, I think we decided to use your nickname, Mai-mai. Your name is so difficult to remember. What was it now?'

'Sze Yuen-tsung.'

'That's right. The last name first. How odd! We don't do that in England.' She laughed and pinched the glasses more firmly on her nose. 'Well, we'll use Mai-mai. Your father said that it would be quite all right to call you that.' So she wrote the name in her trim handwriting inside the book with the date underneath it. Afterwards, when I came across my name in her handwriting, I heard again Miss Wynne's short laugh and the echo of her words: 'How odd! We don't do that in England.'

In Airlie's cheerful company the term passed pleasantly. I liked school. I learned to read, to add, to run scales on a piano. In drawing class I spent ecstatic hours daubing from a box of water colours or making neat precise drawings of flowers, leaves, and still lifes. Very soon I wrote home to ask for a paint box of my own. We wrote letters home every Sunday, after returning from church. On finishing the letters we held them up for inspection by the teacher. If blots or smudges marred the pages, or our writing wandered too aimlessly over the page, we had to rewrite the letter.

Every Monday afternoon we had dancing class. Most of the exercises were from the ballet routine, followed by a riotous period of ballroom dancing. This included waltzes, polkas, foxtrots, and the gallop, which let off a good deal of superfluous energy. Mrs. Ratcliffe, the dancing teacher who

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came from 'outside', was a petite lady with a liking for turbans that exaggerated her large aquiline nose. She made a fine entrance every Monday afternoon, a fur coat draped around her shoulders, followed by her accompanist as if he were her shadow. Standing in the middle of the room, or at



the head of it during the exercise period, Mrs. Ratcliffe called out the various numbers in sonorous tones. Occasionally she singled out one or two of us to do solos; after we had breathlessly exhibited the steps of the dance, she drew a deep breath and sang out, 'Aw . . . ll together!'

Airlie was particularly adept at the ballet steps and could also roll picturesquely through the Sailor's Hornpipe. I took to the Highland Fling as if I had never breathed anything but the air over Scottish moors. Together we flung ourselves wholeheartedly into polkas and glided dreamily through many waltzes.

There was certainly a great emphasis on physical fitness at Caledonia. Besides a walk every morning, rain or shine,

and games for two hours in the afternoon, every Wednesday we had an hour of gym. A retired sergeant with rippling muscles taught us, and it was certainly not his fault that we did not all emerge Amazons from the rope climbing, club swinging, drilling, and acrobatics that he put us through. I adored gym as much as I adored dancing class. In fact I liked all this activity so much that, on finding out that some of the girls took riding, I asked if I could join them. I had never been on a horse. Shortly afterwards I was measured for a riding outfit and was on a horse before there was time to reconsider. For some time I bounced around on a pony called Anne: later they mounted me on a larger steed with the inappropriate name of Sunny Jim. He was so long-legged that I had to be hoisted to his back and caused the groom to remark that the combination looked like 'a flea on an elephant'.

After three terms, Airlie and I could be considered old girls. Probably the best thing we could say about school was that we liked it. There is no doubt that we led a healthy existence, learned what little we did very thoroughly, and enjoyed hugely the large amount of play and exercise in the routine. The school was divided for competitive purposes into two groups, the Picts and the Scots. This prodded us to considerable effort in work and games and much loud cheering for one's side, turned the establishment into something akin to a battleground between two armed camps, but no doubt nourished the group spirit. Airlie was designated a Scot, and I was made a Pict. The rivalry added zest to the games, especially to goalball, an old Sussex game similar to lacrosse, in which we usually played in corresponding positions on the field.

After the games period in the afternoon we had to apply ourselves to homework until tea, and more homework after tea. In the evenings Miss Wynne and Miss Barker read to

us, the older girls in one schoolroom and the younger group in another. While we listened, some of us sewed, others painted or drew. It was an hour we all enjoyed. I especially liked the story of Grinling Gibbons called *The Carved Cartoon*, and *Treasure Island*. There was also a very funny book, *Vice Versa*, in which a father and his son inadvertently, through the powers of a magic stone, exchanged outward appearances. The parent was sent off to boarding school, a situation offering excruciating complications and a very satisfactory outlet for any young rebellious thoughts. Fascinated as I was by the stories of Dickens which were read to us, a good deal in them was terrifying; Artful Dodgers and Mr. Murdstones dogged my dreams, although Mr. Pickwick and his circle were among my favourite people.

On Saturday evenings we had competitions or entertainment. One competition consisted of illustrating an historical event specified on a slip of paper which we each picked out of an assortment in a wastepaper basket. After supper, the drawings were pinned on the gymnasium walls and we circled the room with paper and pencil, guessing the subjects. On one of these evenings it fell to my lot to depict 'The Fire of London, 1666', a tremendous opportunity for licking flames and crumbling buildings. To ensure recognition of the drawing as illustrating *the* Fire of London, I made the chimneys form the 1666, a date that I shall remember to my dying day.

One Saturday evening a little old lady told us about the stars, using an apple as the sun in her demonstration. She also had a glass globe on which circles had been etched to show the planets in their courses. Turning off the lights and using a lamp, she threw the shadows of the apple and the planet trails on the wall. The celestial world rotated slowly across the gymnasium wall, weirdly transforming that familiar space into a realm of the unknown. It was an extraordinary

evening, leaving us dizzy with its kaleidoscopic patterns. Many a night after this, we tried in vain to decipher the skies according to the clues she had taught us. But, confronted by the spacious firmament itself, we could not recognize a single star.

The stars were beyond me, but the night train creeping around the curve of the bay from Eastbourne could always be counted on. After lights out, I sat on the end of my bed and watched for the puffs of smoke and the string of lights to move slowly along the edge of the sea. The presence of the train in the dim flat landscape at a specific moment each evening signalled that all was well at the end of the day.

Meanwhile Airlie, lying on her stomach, with her head at the foot of the bed, squeezed every lingering moment of daylight to read.

'Oh, Airlie, you're not supposed to,' Mary at first remonstrated. Later on, she just said, 'Oh, Airlie,' in a resigned way, and went to sleep.

Airlie consumed books. From my bed I watched a tiny thread of light creeping out from her bed. When she heaved into another position, the streak danced on the ceiling, settling down when she concentrated the flashlight on the book under the bedclothes. I caught the habit later when reading became easier; at that time I was still trying to remember when a 'C' was soft or hard. Occasionally Airlie emerged for air, or with suppressed excitement hung over the side of her bed and pulled my sheet.

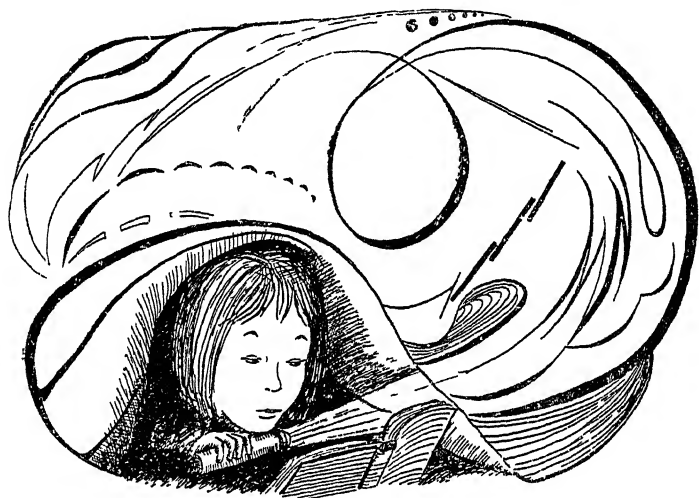
'Listen to this! Isn't it ripping?' A flood of words poured into the space between our two beds, floating in the darkness, weaving invisible shapes around the one spot of light from the torch in Airlie's hand. Long rolling lines scooped across the ceiling alternating with dots and sharp broken lines, jagged, now together, now spaced. Without understanding their meaning, I caught from Airlie's voice the shape and



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colour of the words and phrases. The forms hung in the emptiness of the night, and many times I went to sleep with their shapes melting slowly around me.

Airlie's reading habits earned her a collection of black marks for bad conduct. Our desks in the schoolroom were



located about half way down the room by a window. Airlie's desk was next to the window. She read books on her lap while ostensibly wrestling with her arithmetic or French verbs on the desk.

'Airlie Campbell, what have you got in your lap?' the teacher called sharply down the room. All heads looked up and turned on Airlie.

'A book,' Airlie said simply, holding it up.

'Do I have to report you again, Airlie? Bring it to me!'

Airlie shuffled up to the desk at the head of the room and reluctantly deposited the book in the teacher's care. Within fifteen minutes she was deep in another book, pending the return of the confiscated volume. It was quite a relief when

she was doing her 'literature prep' and could read in peace from a book on top of the desk.

I got acquainted with my neighbour on my left, Joan Denny, and for a long time knew her only in a whisper, as our acquaintance was limited to prep hours. Our friendship began on the barter system.

'Want to swop your new nib for this?' Joan whispered from under cover of her opened desk lid, holding up a big 'bunji', the school term for an eraser. Joan coveted a new pen point I had been given for drawing maps.

'Not to-day,' I replied. 'I'll swop you a Waverley for a Relief', referring to two kinds of nibs which were popular in the school.

'Nothing doing! I bagged the "J" from Monica yesterday. Look!' She displayed proudly a big bronze-coloured nib with a silver 'J' engraved on it. I admired it enviously in silence. The craze in school was for a game of nibs, consisting of manœuvring two nibs by giving them little pushes with the index finger. When one nib flicked under the end of the opponent's, a flip of the finger on the nib could overturn the one on top. If this was successful, the winner got the over-turned nib. Due to the popularity of this game, the demand for nibs in the school far exceeded the number we could possibly have used for work during a term. We each had favourite fighters and second strings. The mapping pen nibs, being small and narrow, were prized because they were practically invincible.

I liked drawing maps as well as I liked playing nibs, so that I was seldom ready to part with the nibs we were given for our geography prep. We were given a free hand in drawing maps as long as the coastlines were accurate and the names in the assignment correctly located. There were endless possibilities in decorating the maps, scalloping the sea-board, making a river crawl nervously across the land, and

shading mountains with a small roll of blotting paper dipped in the ink pot. Airlie achieved a very fancy effect one day on a map of England at the time of the Spanish Armada. Our maps seemed prosaic beside hers, lighted up with the red flames of the beacons that were lit all over England to call the country to arms against the invader. She even inserted in one corner a little sketch of Sir Francis Drake playing bowls in his refusal to get excited over the approach of the enemy. Airlie basked in the glory of these vermilion beacons until someone else turned out a map with some startling effects in Prussian blue.

The big events of the school year were the half holiday in the middle of the Summer Term and the play presented at the end of the Winter Term. On these two occasions the parents dutifully turned up to spend a week-end at a neighbouring hotel and watch us perform.

The half holiday in the middle of the Summer Term was celebrated by the finals of the tennis tournament. Our parents sat patiently through a long Saturday afternoon while we batted balls back and forth over a net. The following day, by school custom, was dedicated to walking by the sea and consuming quantities of ice-cream and ginger beer. Gorgor's half terms usually coincided with ours so that Papa and Mm-mah spent a very strenuous two days, tramping between the two schools and watching interminable cricket matches and tennis games.

There was a tennis coach at Bexhill by the name of Hopkins, a wiry little man who was probably born holding a racket. Hopkins came twice a week and taught us the rudiments of the game. He stood on the other side of the net with a pile of balls and smashed them in quick succession at us as hard as he could, exhorting us to "It it 'ard at 'Opkins! 'It it 'ard! 'Arder!" Hopkins always appeared at the half term

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games in cream-coloured flannels, blazer, and a jaunty straw hat. He enjoyed hugely his social success with all our parents.

At the end of my first Winter Term at school, the play chosen for presentation before the parents was 'The Rose



and the Ring'. In it I was the page to Gruffanuff, the ugly governess who, on picking up the magic ring, was transformed into a ravishing beauty. I had one line. And we rehearsed every evening for five weeks.

Before the entrance of Gruffanuff and her underling, I took the opportunity to peer from the wings and picked out Papa and Mm-mah in the audience crowded on benches in the gymnasium. In the reflection of the footlights I also saw De-de among the younger brothers and sisters on cushions on the floor, practically under the lights. Miss Barker pulled me back. She was prompting in the wings, nodding her head after each speech was completed without any dreadful pauses. Natalie, the girl who was playing Gruffanuff, fiddled with her false nose which at the moment of picking up the ring she shed, to straighten up in all her fair beauty, freckled though

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it was. That was my cue to gaze at her in feigned amazement, practised in five long weeks, and say, 'Oh, Madame, how bee . . . u . . . ti . . . ful you are to-day, ma'am!'

Papa was bursting with parental pride over this line when I saw him afterwards, although he confided, 'I was afraid you were going to drop the crown in the last act.' He was referring to my entrance in the grand finale as an extra at the Court, bearing a cushion on which reposed the crown cut out of gold paper.

'I couldn't have,' I replied knowingly, '*parce que* it was jolly well sewed to the cushion!'

The school idiom had been easiest to learn of anything during the first year. I used it on Papa but with Mm-mah I still spoke Cantonese. I don't know what she thought of me in that silly costume of red tights and yellow top. She probably would have made the same answer as on other occasions, if I had asked her opinion: 'Well, that's what your father wants.' When I went up to her after the play, parents and children being gathered in the dining room for lemonade and cakes, she called my name and smiled at me. All I said to her was 'Mm-mah!' but with great feeling. We had been taught always to call the name of the person we were greeting, the louder the better; just the name and never 'Hullo', which would be most impolite. And it was important to call the other person before they called us. So that on this evening I felt honoured that Mm-mah had made this gesture of approbation.



#### CHAPTER IV

### MUSIC AND MAGIC—YOICKS!

EXCEPT for the two gala events, family matters were seldom brought up at school. For some unfathomable reason it was considered 'frightfully bad form' to talk about one's family. Most of us received weekly letters from home; and the photographs on dressing-tables of stern fathers, the majority in uniform, and beautiful mothers often with an arm around a younger child, sat as mute reminders that we had parents.

This curious taboo had its counterpart at home during the holidays. I began to find it impossible to talk about school. As in many translations of books from one language into another, my attempts to describe in Chinese incidents at English schools distorted the picture to unrecognizable perspectives. It was difficult to describe school without the slang expression and Latin phrases which were so large a part of the life at school. It was impossible, for instance, to tell Mm-mah that when we fought in school I had learned by painful experience that one tussled until the opponent cried

'Pax!' or until one had to call 'Pax!' oneself from sheer exhaustion. To Mm-mah it was not clear why little girls should wrestle and indulge in ragging; and why, if they had to fight, should they resort to Latin cries of surrender? Why indeed?

'You see, when you want to give a warning, if a teacher is coming in, or someone you don't want to see or hear you, someone says "*Cave!*"'. I explained to Papa and Mm-mah. They accepted the information blankly. 'That's Latin for "Look out!"' I added lamely. 'Then when it's all right . . .' No, it was no use trying to continue, to tell them about the feeling of relief as one said that lovely expression, 'All Serene!' There was, therefore, a big gap because of these hundreds of little things which could not be explained; trifles they were but tremendously important in the world of school.

However, there were compensations. Holidays offered a great deal of fun in many ways. There were parties, the pantomime, and Maskelyne's, the home of the best conjurers in the land. There were old haunts to be revisited, old friends to be seen again, and old toys to be played with that had been forgotten for months in the nursery cupboard.

Lady Tuck took us every Christmas holiday to a pantomime. We would hold solemn council with her on our return from school.

'Cind'rella always so charmin',' Lady Tuck suggested.

'Peter Pan!' Gor-gor said firmly.

'Excitin',' Lady Tuck agreed. Then turning to De-de she asked, 'What d'you want to see, ducky?'

'*Where the Rainbow Ends*,' he whispered in her ear. De-de knew that Gor-gor and I did not fancy that rather vapid pantomime in which St. George turned up in flashing armour to help the children in the play out of a tight spot, guiding them eventually to where the rainbow ended.

My favourite pantomime was *Aladdin*, although I liked

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going to the theatre to see anything. Anything, even St. George, was worth seeing for that moment before the curtain goes up, when the lights in the house dim and sink into blackness, the pause followed by the slow rise of the curtain on the noisy opening scene. What a moment!

In *Aladdin* there is a scene in a cave (dark corners and passages of mystery leading where?) chock full of glittering jewels of fabulous size. For some reason Aladdin wanders into this unlikely spot and, as luck would have it, stumbles on a lamp. It looks like an ordinary lamp. What could it be doing there amongst these piles of jewels worth the ransom of twenty kings? Perhaps my mother could use it, Aladdin thinks aloud, bringing us all down to earth with this homely touch. A little polishing would improve its looks. Flash! Bang! Sizzle! The theatre is plunged into darkness as Aladdin rubs the lamp. Not a soul breathes for a split second as a wicked laugh cackles from the stage. What has happened? Where's Aladdin?

In a sickly green spotlight in the centre of the stage a tall black figure emerges, the sequins on his costume quivering as fearfully as we shivered, watching the spectacle with gaping mouths. The Slave of the Lamp in all his awful majesty! B-r-r-r! 'Command me, Aladdin, son of Twankey! You are in possession of the lamp of infinite powers! You have summoned me! I am your slave!'

How terrific! And what a chance! Each of us in the audience racked our thoughts for what we would ask for in such fantastic circumstances. It was like the wonderful game of the three wishes. What would you ask for, if you could have anything in the World? I'd ask, Gor-gor used to say with schoolboy cunning, that any wish I wished would come true.

Aladdin's mother, Widow Twankey, was always played by an actor, the part demanding such acrobatics as no old lady



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could possibly command. Widow Twankey's entrance was always heralded by the patter lines sung on a range of four notes:

'Widow Twankey! Widow Twan . . . key!  
What I might have been,  
A duchess or a queen,  
If I hadn't married a Twan . . . key!'

According to this odd custom on the pantomime stage, whereby men played women's parts and women the heroes, Aladdin's role was usually played by a musical comedy star, fair, curly-locked, and soprano. Once one accepted this quirk of casting, there could be no question that the afternoon was sublime.

It is curious how we like to be frightened as long as the outcome is happily assured. Pantomime seemed to be designed to suspend us in hair-raising fright and then to drop us on lines of low comedy, Widow Twankey's province. As if to soothe the senses at the end of the turbulent afternoon, there was another strange custom of the pantomime world in which a harlequin and columbine, the former in classic black and white diamond-checked tights, the latter in fluffy white ballet skirt, and both with black masks, danced a gentle *pas de deux* in front of the curtain. This pleasant little epilogue, mildly melancholy and so incongruous with *Aladdin*, was perhaps intended as a sop to the grown-ups, to send the children home on a quieter note so that at night there would be no bad dreams in the nurseries of London.

No less exciting were the parties when we danced, played games, and watched magicians wave flags out of the air and juggle white balls. Like most little girls at their first dancing party, I fell in love for one evening; and, truly feminine, I succumbed to a uniform.

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Ordered to rest in the afternoon before this great event, I fidgeted on my bed while Yaomah hung out my white dress with blue ribbons, laid out clean underwear and dancing slippers, examined my lace mittens for holes, and pressed a blue hair ribbon. Such preparations called for a very thorough bath and, when dressed, inspection by parents. Gor-gor and I had both been invited, so we stood proudly before Papa and Mm-mah to show off the final results, Gor-gor in his Eton jacket, long trousers, and the impossible wide stiff collar.

The band was playing gaily as the front door of the Jordan house opened to us. Already many couples were swishing around the room on the ground floor. We went up a flight of stairs to take off our coats, passing a room in which a long table with white cloth and silver was being prepared for the refreshments. A little boy with very pink cheeks, dressed in a uniform like the midshipmen in *Where the Rainbow Ends*, darted from the room. He stared at us and quickly ran down the stairs.

Coming down to the dancing, the pink-cheeked boy edged over to us.

'Want to dance?' he said to me in a high treble. I acquiesced and we slid away to rotate among the couples on the floor. Out of the corner of my eye I saw Gor-gor being led by the arm to be introduced to a little girl on a chair. He manœuvred her around the room. It seemed to me he was using his left arm a bit vigorously; his partner looked as if she were signalling rather than dancing.

My partner was inclined to push a bit, and to come to abrupt halts when we narrowly missed colliding with other couples.

'Sorry!' he said in a very grown-up voice. We danced in silence until the music stopped. 'Here. Got your programmer?' he asked. I held up the white card which I had

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slipped by its white cord and little pencil around my wrist. The names of the dances were listed on the card with a dotted line beside each number. My partner filled four spaces with an illegible name and, without a word, disappeared among the dancers.

I danced next with a replica of Gor-gor in an Eton suit. And then Gor-gor, with brotherly solicitude or perhaps for a change from dancing with the girl on the chair, danced with me and asked if I was enjoying myself.

'Yes,' I replied. 'Very much. Are you? Who is the girl on the chair? Why do you pump so with your arms?'

'I don't know her name but they keep telling me to ask her to dance,' he protested. 'That keeps time,' he continued in answer to my question. 'You have to keep time. Besides, that's the way you let your partner know what to do.'

A tall boy in kilts was most impressive and far prettier than any of the girls in the room. We all, I think, fluttered a bit when he whirled us around the dance floor.

'Do you live in London?' he asked politely, guiding me in a neat chasse to the left.

'Yes. Do you?'

'We live in Harrow Weald.' I had no idea where Harrow Weald was. 'Do you hunt?' he asked in a superior sort of way.

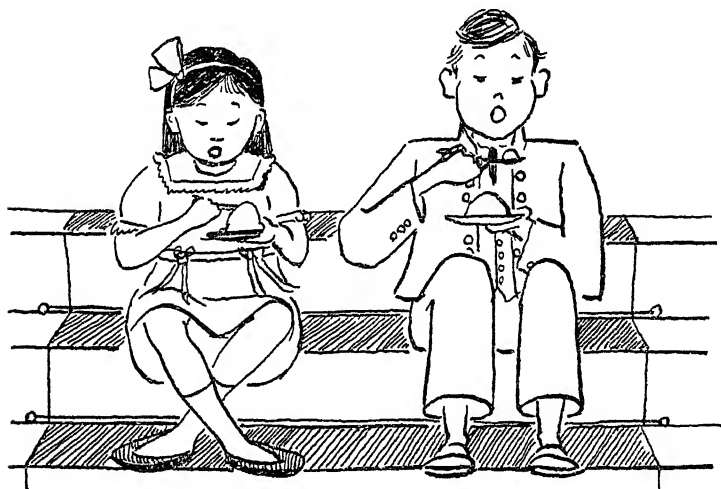
'No. We ride at school. I'm going to jump next term. Joan Denny hunts.' Obviously I was not in a class with this vision in kilts.

When the music stopped, my friend with the pink cheeks suddenly appeared beside me.

'Ours, I believe,' he said in his high-pitched voice. The number was a gallop. As soon as the first note was struck, he grabbed me around the waist and careered across the room regardless of slower couples who had not yet started.

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'Oh, sorry!' he said in the same gruff manner as before, as we entangled with a grown-up couple who were trying to get out of our way. Hunting might not have been in my line but the gallop around the room must have equalled many a mile of fox-chasing.



The music mercifully came to a crashing end. We were both panting from the faithful rendering of the dance.

'Want a lemonade?' he asked. I agreed to the welcome refreshment and we went upstairs to the room with the long table.

'It's this end.' My partner pulled me to one side, proving that his early reconnoitring showed keen foresight. 'You wait here.' He pushed through a group around the end of the table. I caught glimpses of him in and out and around the group. Finally he returned triumphant with two large dishes of ice cream and cake. We went to the head of the stairs and sat on two steps.

'Wait here. I'll be back in a jiffy,' he said again, and dis-

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appeared into the room from which he returned with two glasses of lemonade. We tackled the ice cream silently.

'Having nice hols?' he asked suddenly.

'Yes,' I replied, adding lamely, 'are you?'

'Ripping! Went to Maskelyne's yesterday. Marvellous!'

'We went there last week. What was your favourite?'

'When he stuck the swords in the box with the other man in it.'

'Was it a man in the audience who went up to sit in the box?'

'Yes. Do you suppose he always does that?'

We were both stunned by the possibility, which had never entered our heads till this moment.

'Oh, I say! Isn't that rotten?' he exclaimed. I agreed. We had most probably been fooled.

'What a sell!' The pink cheeks blew out in disgust.

'Where do you go to school?' I asked, to change the subject.

'Osborne. Navy, y'know,' he replied, obviously proud of the connection. I knew that Osborne was the name of the junior naval academy because my schoolmates often chattered about brothers there.

'Want another ice?'

'No, thanks.'

'Want to dance?'

'Yes. Let's.'

This time we moved with moderate grace around the room. It was a waltz. As the music swayed the couples to and fro, we floated – at least that was how it felt – floated smoothly.

'Like to dance?' my partner asked.

'Um!' I assented. I thought how very much I liked to dance. This was much better than dancing under Mrs. Ratcliffe's eye. This was marvellous.

'Me too,' said the pink cheeks.

After a rollicking 'Sir Roger de Coverley' and a foxtrot or two, Gor-gor and I were told that someone from home had come to fetch us. I was loath to go, especially as I had several dances booked and one more with the pink cheeks from Osborne. But obediently I went upstairs and put on my coat. En route to the front door, I saw my friend sitting on the stairs with another girl.

'Hullo! Going already?'

'Yes.'

'Oh, I say! We had another dance.'

'I'm awfully sorry,' I said, tearing myself away and going down the stairs slowly. I wanted to tell him how much I had enjoyed it all, and how I hated to go. For some reason I could not say another word. Moreover Gor-gor had grabbed my coat and was giving it impatient tugs.

The return to school removed the holidays into a distant world remembered as in a dream, jumbled, incoherent, and somehow unreal. After the first year, the terms followed monotonously in almost the same pattern; outstanding for me was the term during which I learned to read for myself.

Up to then I had enjoyed the stories read to us in the evenings, and the poems we had to learn. As I progressed in 'English Literature', we began memorizing long speeches from the plays of Shakespeare to be delivered spiritedly in class. We each in turn opined that we would 'rather be a dog, and bay the moon, than such a Roman'. And there were boisterous unforgettable sessions when we sang some of the songs in the plays. These and some speeches had been set to music for part singing, an arrangement which we treated competitively rather than in unison. The altos in the class stood together bravely as we joyfully proclaimed: 'I know . . . now a bank where the wild thyme blows . . .'

I understood little of the Shakespeare we learned and read.

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For this reason, perhaps, the most wonderful line in Shakespeare to me was a stage direction – ‘Enter Ariel, invisible’.

The much loved *Alice in Wonderland*, when I first read it, did not appeal to me in any way. As everyone else seemed,



to adore it, it was a long time before I would admit that I found it a cruel book, twisted in some painful way I could not describe, and that to me Alice seemed a horrible, ugly little girl. Well-nigh blasphemy though it was, I thought the Tenniel Alice hideous with its oversized head and sick eyes.

The school library was a small square room, rather dark for its purpose. For several terms I concentrated on the wall of shelves on the light side of the room; the dim recesses remained locked in shadow as I cheerfully believed that there would be time enough to read all the books. In fact, for a long time there was no doubt in my mind that one would eventually read everything.

Meanwhile, the first taste of being able to choose what

book to read next was delicious. Standing in front of the shelves before even touching a book, there was that wonderful moment of knowing 'All this and I can choose'. As one reached out and opened book after book, the pictures in one looked stuffy, the paragraphs in another discouragingly thick. One sentence sometimes led to the selection of a book, while occasionally the feel of a book, the texture of its cover or the spacing of the print on the page, made it the choice of the moment. I was misled very often into choosing a book because I enjoyed handling it or took a fancy to the layout of the print on the page; nevertheless these factors continued to hold importance.

Tomes of Ruskin reposed in dusty but lovely leather bindings on a top shelf. One attempt to understand even a tiny part soon returned the volume to its lofty perch. *The King of the Golden River*, however, happily proved that Ruskin was not altogether indigestible. On the other hand, the leather-and-gold-trimmed set of Sir Walter Scott's romances was not only wonderful to handle but gave Airlie and me a term of gripping moments and idyllic reverie. There was no weighing of merit in my choice of reading matter. Airlie's sense of discrimination was far more developed. She had been brought up in a home full of books, and she handled them and spoke of them with a familiarity which was less due to precociousness than to being used to having books around. None the less, I enjoyed that first stage of reading everything within arm's reach, the eminent in English literature being no greater in my eyes than Conan Doyle and the authors of *Tiger Tim* and *Marzipan the Magician*. The witches in the fairy books gave the same amount of shivers up the spine as Shylock's persistence over a pound of flesh.

We were fortunate in our first history books. They made the events and people of the past come alive in stories which



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were remarkably faithful to fact. Within those orange-covered books we were introduced to the electric personalities of Akbar, Nebuchadnezzar, and Hammurabi; Galileo and Copernicus; Magellan, Vasco da Gama, and Columbus; Richard Cœur de Lion, Charlemagne, Peter the Great, Elizabeth, and all those great names in history which belong to the world and no longer only to their own nations. It was a grand company we kept in that first history course. What a sweep in history! But it never happened again in the classroom.

In the next history course we plunged into Saxon kings and early English history, never viewing the human pageant from the world view but for ever centred in the fortunes of the island kingdom. It was lucky for us that English history happens to be fascinating, and that it offers much to be admired and remembered.

The strip of Sussex coast where we learned our first lessons is one of the most historic in all England. We went on many excursions on Summer Saturdays to Hastings, where William the Conqueror established his rule, and where Harold fought bravely but was killed by an arrow shot into his eye. We viewed the shell of Pevensey Castle and the Roman forts lining along the coast. We walked where Angles, Saxons, Danes, and Romans had trod. We picnicked on Beachy Head where in Elizabeth's day a beacon had been lighted in emergencies. We tramped through abbeys, castles, manors, and churches; gazed at tapestries, stiff suits of armour, staves, furniture, tankards, and tender personal mementoes, each of which spoke to us of some period in the past.

History came easily when we could see that it was not all wars and pestilence, kings and usurpers, court intrigues and parliamentary squabbles as the history books presented it. It was also made up, as we could see with our own eyes, of

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the way ordinary people lived, dressed, ate, worshipped, worked and played. It was easy to believe the history books when one could walk by the same chestnuts and oaks under which Englishmen had fought or invaders had rested before proceeding northward. It was easy to remember what the history books told as gospel when one closed one's eyes, standing on the pebbled beach, and caught with imagination's ear the grinding of keels of boats full of foreign soldiers; or when, on opening one's eyes and listening intently, one could hear on certain clear days the faint rumble of the guns in the war going on at that moment in France. The Channel was not much more of a barrier than some of the moats we had seen now dry around the old castles. The waters of the Channel had carried many invaders to England's shore and many an English battalion across to the continent.

Nor was it difficult to believe some of the stories of famous ghosts which haunted the halls and bedrooms of many an old dwelling. The Old Mint House at Battle, at the gates of the Abbey, was haunted by the ghost of a lady whose tongue had been cut out. The caretaker told the gruesome story, lingering over each detail and assuring us that he had heard the rustle of her dress as she ran down the narrow passages at night, and the moans of the poor lady which had cast such a spell on the house.

Under the house were yawning caves that spread far beyond the foundations of the small building above them. They were smugglers' caves and were once connected by tunnels to Hastings at the edge of the sea. We had visited similar caves in Hastings, and it took very little imagination to visualize the comings and goings of those smuggler bands.

It was perhaps this absorption with history that made us attach great importance to the members of the royal family. The interest was increased by the half holidays often pro-

claimed on the occasion of some celebration in the royal circles, such as the wedding of Princess Mary. We all felt personally about her after that extra half holiday.

By chance it was Princess Mary who brought the revelation to me that adults could get as embarrassed and uncomfortable as children. At a Boy Scouts' Jamboree in the huge arena of the Crystal Palace we sat just below the royal box. Princess Mary, looking very pretty in a Girl Guide's uniform, appeared to review the grand assembly of Scouts and Guides from all over the British Empire. All eyes turned to watch her entrance; mingled with the affection and respect which can always be felt in a British crowd for their rulers, there was curiosity and eagerness for a good look at their Princess. She blushed deeply and fidgeted nervously with her gloves. It was the way we felt when the teacher called for the past tense of a verb and one did not know it; the conditional tense, yes, even the participle, but at that moment nary a sign of the past tense.

A grown-up blushes too. A grown-up feels uncomfortable inside too.

It is curious the various ways in which the adult world and the child's world first meet. The bump. The pieces which break and crumble. The beginning of coming together to merge slowly into each other.

Mademoiselle, who had hair on her lip, screamed at us when we made a slip in declining an irregular verb or proved particularly obtuse in remembering pronunciations. Mademoiselle lost her patience easily and she had favourites.

A grown-up loses her temper too. A grown-up stamps her foot. And, enormous discovery, a grown-up can be wrong.

In contrast to Mademoiselle, there was Miss Clegg who taught us English composition. Miss Clegg was a tall gaunt woman with an ugly face — a long face and a big nose that was several tones pinker than her cheeks. Her hair, done in

pancake style, never completely stayed up; wisps lay on the back of her neck and, when she was drumming the idiosyncrasies of spelling or the use of the semi-colon into our feeble memories, wisps in front slipped from their moorings. Savagely she pushed them back. Her eyes were a piercing blue and set too close to each other. But Miss Clegg had a heart and a real appreciation of the English language; although in her impatience she often rapped a ruler on our knuckles and remarked scathingly on our stupidity, most of us adored her. She was, as Kitty would have put it, 'an ole darlin'.' Strict as she was that we learn the rules of grammar, our exercise books revealed her main tenet, that it was much more important to feel the words and fit them in a comfortable order at the cost of breaking rules. And whenever any of us managed to insert a new word into our compositions, she always applauded this struggling increase in vocabulary. Airlie was naturally a great favourite of Miss Clegg who, unlike the other teachers, encouraged Airlie's peculiarities of expression.

Between Airlie and Miss Clegg I heard a great deal about the poets in the English tradition. There was a magnificent sweep and beautiful detail in much that they quoted; but I got heartily sick of the Romantics and the Victorians. During one of these spells I went to another extreme and wallowed in the school-girl tales of Angela Brazil. From that treacle world I was rescued by G. A. Henty; but, due to the dashing manner in which he swept through battle after battle in history, the march of events was vividly conjured forth as a succession of British triumphs in which drummer boys and trumpeters played inordinately-prominent parts.

During the summer terms there was more time for reading mainly because of the hours of daylight after going to bed. Without breaking rules, however, there was also more time

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for reading on Sunday afternoons when we sat in the garden wherever we chose and read whatever we pleased, and on weekdays in the late afternoon and evening when not playing tennis or pulling the last weed out of our gardens.



The gardens were small rectangular plots, not much larger than three by five feet; sufficient room, however, to indulge in landscaping of quite an original order. Each plot was tended by two girls. My co-gardener was a girl called Ursula. While she trimmed the edges of our garden, Ursula dreamed of transforming our tiny rose bush into a trellis plant far exceeding the limits of our modest piece of earth. We finally 'had words' over the sticks and branches with which she insisted on surrounding the rose bush in hopes that one sprig or another would stray and entwine, thus starting the bower which she could already see enveloping the garden.

These hopeful attempts soon erected a sort of barricade around the rose bush, made our garden look as if we were about to start a bonfire in the middle, and interfered with my struggles at the moment to curb a small lupin in the rear.

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Our arguments finally reached a climax one day with Ursula hurling a water-can at my head, soaking me, and my leaping at her in a wild attack with a trowel. The result was several marks for bad conduct, and Ursula was removed to co-ownership of a plot at the other end of the row.

I remained with the lupin and the rose bush, sharing the labours of the garden in comparative peace with a girl called Pamela. Pamela was very nearsighted. She wore a pair of steelrimmed spectacles which rested halfway down her nose so that her head was constantly thrown back and to one side, to make it possible for her to survey the world through the lenses. Her approach to gardening was definitely bookish. She would rush up to me in between classes with a flower book in her hand and suggest that we should look into the possibilities of having flowers such as blossomed luxuriously on a colour plate that caught her fancy. We did invest in packets of seeds several times, but due to Pamela's impatience, which caused her to dig up and have a look at the seeds every few days, and her ardour in drenching them every evening, the flowers never made an appearance. We finally put in mustard-and-cress and radishes, all of which sprouted practically immediately, and moreover were edible. Pamela's disappointment over the recalcitrant flowers was somewhat lightened by being able to talk about our kitchen garden.

On Sunday evenings in the summer term the fifty-two of us walked across the fields behind the school to the woods. Free of the crocodile formation of weekday walks, we meandered happily over the fields, picking blackberries and wild roses, vaulting gates and scrambling over stiles until we reached the woods. There we were allowed to wander and play as we pleased until the whistle summoned us to be counted and return to school.

Early one summer, in the middle of a game of hide-and-

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seek, I found an open space in the woods carpeted thickly with bluebells. The tall trees enclosing the space made almost a perfect circle. Steeped at that time in the *Blue*, *Grey*, and *Pink Fairy Books*, I held my breath at this sight. Surely this was an enchanted spot. Hoping nobody would find me and that the game would not bring a group scampering to the spot, I pushed through the bluebells. It was a pity to trample them, but they clustered so thickly I could not avoid doing so; picking a spot as near the centre of the circle as I could guess, I flopped on the ground. The bluebells rose up in a lavender blue wave around me. On the outer rim of the circle the trees stood straight and silent, and above them the clouds moved slowly across the sky. The cloud shapes shifted, the face at one end floating into an elephant with raised trunk and changing gradually into an unrecognizeable design. It was all unbelievably lovely. There was a harmony in those moments I had not known before. 'I am I in the middle of this magic circle,' I pronounced solemnly.

'Yoicks! Yoicks!' The cry rang through the woods. It was Airlie's call. Without moving, I called back, 'Yoicks!' A rustling and cracking of twigs announced that Airlie was plunging through the undergrowth. She bounded up to the spot where I was lying.

'"O Attic shape! Fair attitude!" What the deuce are you doing, lubberduck?' she asked, a bit short of breath.

'Thinking . . . till your fairy footsteps broke into my domain! Isn't this a lovely place?'

'M . . . m . . . m,' she assented and sat down beside me. 'Smells heavenly. I say, it's a perfect circle. How marvellous.' She drew a deep breath of satisfaction. 'What were you thinking?'

'About people being people. I don't know how to explain. You know, about I being I and you being you, everyone being an I. And how when you're thinking about that sort

## MUSIC AND MAGIC

of thing, it's nice thinking there are you's and it also is a very lonely feeling. I don't know really how to explain.'

'M . . . mm. I know what you mean. It's like *The Ancient Mariner*.' We sat quietly, not moving or speaking.

'Wish Mum could see this,' Airlie said wistfully. It was a wish often expressed by her.

'I've got a new sister,' I announced, remembering the news received earlier in the week.

'What? When?'

'The other day, or p'raps it was a week ago. I had a letter.'

'Wonder what it looks like.'

'Rather exciting and rather nice having a new sister.'

'Must be. There's only Dulcie and me in our family so I don't know how it feels. Aren't you longing to see it?'

'Rather!'

'I suppose Chinese babies have black hair,' Airlie reflected. 'I wonder what makes people have different coloured hair.'

'Something in the roots, I think.'

'And people like Ruth Barrett with curls and me with this sort of hair,' Airlie continued.

'Sir James told me once but I can't remember now.'

Sir James belonged to another world. To remember him brought a host of pictures to mind: Sir James drinking tea by the fire; the Cantlies' nanny mending socks and picking a reel out of her work-basket with its neat rows of thread, packets of needles, measuring tape rolled up, and the darn-ing egg; Mm-mah coming out of her bedroom dressed to go out to dinner, looking lovely in a blue dress, slipping on her finger a ring with a dark blue stone and diamonds that sparkled in the electric light. The scent of her perfume or powder made my nose twitch even in remembering. Now that sitting-room was another nursery. A new sister!

'More *mein*.'



## ECHO OF A CRY

'What?' Airlie asked, coming out of her own thoughts.

'Every birthday at home we have *tong mein* — noodles in soup. It's for long life. Don't like them very much. I was thinking that now there's one more time every year to eat them.'



'What a sell!' was Airlie's sympathetic comment. 'Can't you have something else?'

'No. You have to eat the *mein*.' There was a finality about eating *mein* on birthdays that was indisputable. Acceptance of the custom and acquiescence without knowing exactly why had a chilling effect on both of us.

'Let's explore!' Airlie suggested. We got up slowly and waded through the bluebells to the other side of the glade. The brambles were thick under the trees, as few people evidently had walked through this portion of the woods. We pushed deeper among the trees.

'Half a mo', I said. 'Look at those primroses!'

In the distance a whistle blew shrilly in three long shrieks.

## MUSIC AND MAGIC

'Help me, Airlie, I want to take them back for the garden. D'you suppose they'll last till we get back?'

'Of course. Giddy-up though! That was the whistle.' I was already down on my knees scooping deep around and underneath the clump of primroses, hurrying but carefully protecting the roots.

'Got a hanky?'

'Here.'

I placed the clump gently in our two handkerchiefs and carried it with both hands.

'We've got to hurry.' Airlie led the way quickly back to the path which led out of the woods. We arrived panting but triumphant with the primroses safe and uncrushed. They were planted in a place of honour in front of the rose bush and flourished each season of the rest of my stay at school.

When the term came to an end, I went home and met the new sister. She was plump with big brown eyes and lots of hair on the top of her head. A Nurse Whittle had joined the household, and Papa and Mm-mah's sitting-room had been transformed into a special nursery. I was allowed to hold the baby if I sat down first and proved that there was a strong foundation under me.

As long as Nurse Whittle was around, there was a strict routine for the baby. Every bottle was scoured, measured, and warmed according to schedule. We were allowed to see the baby only at certain hours. Soon after Nurse Whittle left, Mary Webb, a nanny of the old school, came to take care of the baby. Nanny had brought up many babies in her time; her possessions marked the steps in her long career. A big clock in a leather case represented fifteen years with one family; a nightgown case beautifully embroidered and trimmed with lace the gift of one of her girls. An umbrella with a gold top was prized because one of her boys gave it to

her; and a precious brooch was worn every day as a memento of another.

Nanny adored the baby, who was called Betty after a friend of the family. Her Chinese name was Ying-tsung, the *Ying* meaning England from the Chinese *Ying-kuo*. All the girls in our family have the *tsung* in the last half of our names; it is some kind of precious stone.

Betty was a 'Glaxo' baby, and thrived on that baby food to such proportions that Sir James announced she was the healthiest baby in London, a rash statement that provoked a deluge of protests. Nanny was terribly proud, and her joy knew no bounds when the statement got into the *Daily Sketch*. She was all for taking up the challenges from indignant mothers in London. Papa had to be quite severe to squelch Nanny's enthusiasm. Many years later, Nanny revived the statement for quotation among her nurse friends in the park and at the seaside. They made sociable noises but even Nanny realized by then that 'enough is sufficient'.



## CHAPTER V

### HIGHLAND FLING

THERE is one photograph of Gor-gor, De-de, and me that was not in the collection on my aunt's wall. In it we were again lined up, with De-de and I holding hands. In height, expressions, and positions, there was not much difference from the photograph taken on our arrival in London; but there was an odd look about us in the later picture that was not at first glance explainable. The reason was not far to seek. We were dressed in sweaters and kilts, the boys with sporrans slung across their kilts, and our bonnets set jauntily with the ribbons in the back curling over the shoulder. But, of course, the Chinese faces under the Scottish bonnets did not go with the clothes. Nothing much could be done about that.

We had gone up to Kilmarñock with Betsy, the friend whose name had been borrowed for our little sister. It was a

## ECHO OF A CRY

long trip and De-de, who always turned pale and green from train sickness, was quite limp when we finally arrived at the house in Kilmarnock, our bags, satchels, and Gor-gor's cricket bat strewn over the steps and the path leading to the



front door. In answer to Betsy's tug on the bell knob, the door opened. An old gentleman with more hair on his chin than on the top of his head, and a pair of glasses on the end of his nose, stepped out and greeted us.

'Ha, ha!' he cried. 'And these, Bess, be your three wee heathen! Lassies and lads, I salute ye!' The salute was surprising. Bending his knees and leaning forward, Mr. Thompson put his right hand behind his bald head and wiggled his fingers over the top at us.

We were gathered into the house which was home to Mr. Thompson, his younger daughter, Sadie, and Matt. Sadie

## HIGHLAND FLING

was a sturdy, smaller edition of her sister, Betsy, with soft red hair and patches of freckles over her face. Matt was an orphan who had lived with them most of his thirteen years; he also had red hair, but stiff and fiercely carrot-coloured, from which freckles also seemed inseparable.

Within the next two or three days, the outfits in the photograph had been bought and we had unpacked and repacked all our bundles. Piled in the hall with Sadie's, Matt's, and Mr. Thompson's luggage, it looked as if an expedition were bound for the other end of the earth. Actually we went but a short distance, across the Firth of Clyde to the Isle of Arran.

The boat was named *Atalanta*, a very grand name, but she had only one small black funnel and creaked and groaned all the way to the island. We stood at the rail and rolled out the Scotch words that had already caught our fancy: Arran! Kilmarnock! Sporrán! Ardrossan!

'Br . r . rogue!' Gor-gor added triumphantly. That was what Betsy had called our shoes.

At the edge of the water against the sky a purple strip of land emerged, near the middle of which rose a tall mountain. As we approached, the mists slowly descended and covered the peak. A little later the mountain raised its head again to be wrapped the next moment by thick mist; and nothing could be seen until we arrived at the dock.

The next morning we were dismayed to find at the breakfast table large bowls of porridge. In front of each place was a bowl of the oatmeal and a bowl of milk. We learned to eat it as we should, with a sprinkling of salt for each spoonful of oatmeal dipped into the bowl of milk.

'Don't ye eat this in China, laddie?' Mr. Thompson asked Gor-gor, as we were slow in finishing our portions.

'No, Mr. Thompson, sir,' Gor-gor mumbled. 'But we have it at school in one bowl.'

'It's a bit like *tsook* that we have at home,' I said. 'Except this is brown and lumpy.'

'It'll make ye strong!' Mr. Thompson assured us. 'Finish it quickly and ye can go with Matt to the lighthouse.'

'Baths first!' Betsy reminded us firmly.

Soon after breakfast we put on bathing suits and dressing gowns, and marched down to the sea. The path led over a cliff and down through the brown bracken to the edge of the water. The wind was cold and the waves looked grey and colder. After the first tremulous moment, we learned to plunge in quickly and churn the water, the faster the better, and the warmer.

'It's jolly co . . . co . . . cold!' Gor-gor remarked superfluously. My teeth rattled in reply. But after it was all over, we ran up and down the beach until our bodies glowed. We learned also to like this morning dip that was partly for cleanliness, for we were scrubbed in a tin tub only once a week; and it was a fine feeling afterwards to run as fast as one could along the shore with the salt taste of the sea in one's mouth.

Matt rowed to the little island off Arran twice a week to get vegetables from the lighthouse keeper. We usually went with him. Mr. Gunn, who tended the lighthouse, played the bagpipes and, when he saw us approaching, he would pipe us ashore.

'Come and meet Primrose,' he invited us on our first visit. We climbed the path with him and followed him into the kitchen of the little house in the shadow of the lighthouse. Primrose, his wife, was baking at her oven. She was large and jolly with cheeks even redder than Mr. Gunn's.

'Och!' she greeted our entrance. 'Look at them mites in a Hee'land skairt!' She laughed and laughed so heartily that we could not help joining in her merriment. And while Matt went out to collect the vegetables, we sat and talked with Primrose. Mr. Gunn stood in the doorway and blew his

pipes. They wheezed and moaned, then the notes began to swirl through the kitchen, unlike any music we had ever heard but lovely just the same, with a wild, sad quality.

'Gie us a dance, Tom!' Primrose said one day when we were paying a call. Gor-gor and De-de were helping Matt to collect the vegetables, and I was watching Primrose in her kitchen. Mr. Gunn, as usual, seemed to have nothing to do but stand around and keep Primrose company with his bagpipes under his arm. Now he raised them and wound them up with a wheeze and a moan. He gave us a lively tune that set us all tapping on the floor.

'Come on, lass, and dance with Primrose!'

Round and round we turned with a skip and a tap and a shuffle. Faster and faster as Mr. Gunn blew with all his might, his face redder and redder.

'Your arm like this,' Primrose gasped as she kept time to the whirling music. 'And your other one so!' She raised one hand over her head and placed the other on her hip. And away we went — tap and hop, tap and hop, skip, skip, skip, and back again, this side and that side, and round and round.

'Aye!' Primrose collapsed on the floor with a sigh, laughing in spite of her breathlessness. 'Me bones are too old for such doings! Och, Tom, ye'll wind me to me death!' Mr. Gunn stopped and laid his pipes down on a bench. 'But that be a merry tune,' Primrose added, wiping her face with her apron. 'Here, lass, help yourself to a piece of gingerbread.' Primrose's gingerbread was one of the wonderful things about Arran, that and the sea and the mountain, and the strange light that sometimes broke through the mists.

Another thing that we ate for the first time on Arran was a winkle. Sometimes at the end of an afternoon, Matt would say, 'Let's gather winkles for tea!' We went down to the rocks and picked them, the black shells looking none too appetizing. But when, in the middle of tea, Matt brought in



a steaming bowl of the winkles and put them on the table, they looked very tempting.

'Here's a pin!' Matt said, as he handed one to each of us. 'Now, so!' He held up the winkle. 'And so!' He picked the meat out of the little shell with a pin. 'And so!' He popped it into his mouth and winked.

'Will anyone have another cup of tea?' Mr. Thompson asked from his end of the table. 'No? Well, I'm having another cup of tea, a cup of long tea, I am thinking!' He went with his cup in his hand to Betsy's end of the table and picked up the big black pot. 'L . . . ong tea, lads!' He raised the pot high up in the air and poured it in a long spurt into the cup. It was a daily ritual that he made the same question at teatime and poured his tea 'long' each time.

'It's a lot of food we have at teatime, Mr. Thompson, sir,' Gor-gor remarked.

'Aye! We call it high tea, laddie.'

'Why high?'

'I don't rightly know. They call it high tea when ye eat meat or fish or cheese with your tea. A lot of things are high in Scotland — the mountains, the Highlands, High Streets, some high-minded people . . . and some birds are high when you hang them for a long while!' He seemed pleased at this remark and chuckled into his cup. When he saw that we enjoyed his joke too, Mr. Thompson put his hand up and gave the famous salute.

After tea we took turns telling stories. Betsy told the best tales, but sometimes she insisted that we took turns.

'It's your turn,' she replied, when we asked for a story.

'No, please, Betsy, you tell one!'

'Let's do the Chinese rhyme and do it fair,' she suggested.

'You know the one I mean, the "Salted Fish"!'

'Aye!' Mr. Thompson agreed. 'Eenie, meenie, minie mo . . . in China!'

## HIGHLAND FLING

So De-de began pointing at each of us in the circle around the fire, reciting:

*'Harm yu tow,  
Harm yu mei,  
Mao yu tow sut,  
Lie cheok nay!'*

In English the rhyme goes something like this:

*'Salt fish's head,  
Salt fish's tail,  
Cat stole both,  
But the blame's on you!'*

And the rhyme ended when De-de's finger pointed at Betsy, so everyone was content.

'Black Agnes, please!' De-de pleaded.

'Well,' Betsy began. 'In the old, old days when the Br . . . ritish were not disposed to mind their own business, and were bothering the Scots, a British army was camped outside the castle of Black Agnes.

'Black Agnes's husband — and he was a fine brave man you may be sure — he and his army were away fighting in another part of Scotland, and so Black Agnes and her maids were the only persons in the castle. Day after day the British called up to her to surrender. And day after day, locked securely in her castle, Black Agnes proudly refused, saying . . . What did she say, De-de?'

'Never . . rr be it said that Black Agnes was sca . . rr . . red of the British!' De-de growled in his best Scottish manner.

'Then the British were very angry,' Betsy continued. 'And they began to sling stones and rocks at the castle. There was an awful lot of noise what with stones and rocks crashing and the British shouting. And Black Agnes, who

## ECHO OF A CRY

was the proudest, the tallest, the most beautiful lady in the land — for as you know her hair was like a raven's wing and her skin as white as milk — called her maids to her and commanded them to go up with her to the top of the castle on to the parapets. And she ordered them to bring with them all the towels that they could find.

'So they all marched up on to the parapets with bundles of towels, and perhaps a sheet or two. And every time a stone or rock hit the castle, Black Agnes with a graceful gesture wiped the spot with a towel to show her disdain for British. And so a Scotch lady with a towel thwarted a British army at her own very gates!'

Once in a while, instead of telling stories after tea, Matt took us out in the rowboat to fish. Black Agnes, Bonnie Prince Charlie, and the fairy tales that Betsy told too were wonderful, but when a day had been hot and still, as occasionally they were, it was good to be outside in the evening. We set off down to the wharf. There was such a deep hush over the water and hills of heather that if someone had shouted suddenly, it seemed possible that the mountains might have crumbled. The sea was clear and smooth like a piece of glass. Every time the oars dipped and rose out of the water, a trickle of silver drops fell back into the sea. By the time we had rowed out far enough, the day had dimmed, softening the outline of the mountain and the island behind us. Soon a round silver moon rose in the sky.

We baited the hooks and threw the lines into the water. Matt had brought along a bag of apples and his crunching was the only sound to be heard.

'You'll frighten the fish!' Gor-gor whispered indignantly.

'Ha, ha! D'ye think they can hear me?'

'Anyway you're letting them know we're here!'

'O . . . oh!' De-de gasped. His line jerked.

'Catch him! Pull it!' Matt leaned over to help him pull

## HIGHLAND FLING

the line in, but it was too late; the line had slackened and the fish was lost.

'I got one! I got one!' Gor-gor cried excitedly.

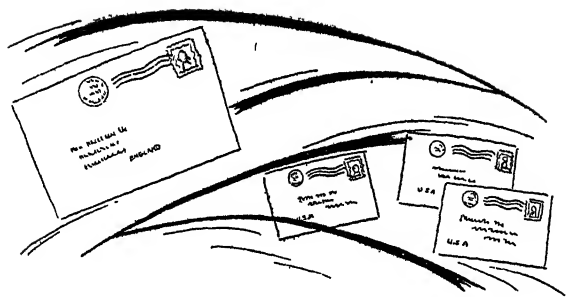
'Hush! You'll frighten the poor thing!' Matt teased him.



For hours we sat, waiting, pulling the lines in quickly hand over hand, and laying the fish as we caught them in the bottom of the boat.

'Look, he's asleep!' Matt pointed at De-de. 'We'll best be getting home.' Pushing aside a fish in the bottom of the boat with his foot, Matt settled down to the oars. The moon was now high over our heads, white and clear, touching the top of the water and casting a cool light on the shore, the mountain, and our boat. There lay over us an air of the enchanted.

'Oh, Moon, Moon!' I prayed silently. 'Let us stay enchanted!'



## CHAPTER VI

### GROWING THINGS

THE pattern of holiday and school, another holiday and again back to school, seemed set and as if it would continue indefinitely. But one day at school I received news that Papa and Mm-mah were going to America, and taking the baby and Nanny. Gor-gor, De-de, and I were to stay and finish school. De-de had joined Gor-gor at St. Wilfrid's. During the holidays, arrangements had been made for the boys to live with Sir James, and I was to go to the Cheals, a family who lived at a place called Crawley, Sussex.

The letter, like most of Papa's letters at that time, was typewritten and sent in carbon copies to each of his children. Our letters home were enclosed and exchanged so that we each had news of the others in this roundabout way. Due to the extreme diligence of the secretary at home, I often received my own letter back two or three weeks after writing it. This habit in our family led us to start our letters with a large flourish — 'Dear All', and it also led to some confusion when paragraphs intended for one of us were interpreted by the others as addressed to them. On the strength of one such sentence in this over-all correspondence, I ordered a new coat through Miss Wynne, while De-de, for whom the

## GROWING THINGS

paragraph was intended, neglected to do anything about it and wore his coat with its sleeves almost to the elbow through several terms. When Papa, who was on the other side of the Atlantic, heard about this situation, he began inserting sections in his letters headed by our names in capital letters and underlined in blue pencil, which lent the letters some of that slightly hysterical urgency of the diplomatic pouch.

I was stunned by the news that I was to go and live with the Cheals, whom Papa referred to as 'your guardians'. I thought the phrase sounded important and used it airily on several occasions until Airlie remarked that I sounded as if I were going to prison.

During the holidays we had motored down several times to tea with the Cheals. Vaguely I remembered having met an old lady and gentleman, a tall bony woman and a fairly fat one, all of whose cheeks were rosy and whose faces seemed very well scrubbed. They lived in a little house in the middle of a garden full of flowers. The only other thing I could recall was that the old lady addressed everyone as 'thee'.

It was not long before I got acquainted with the Cheals, for, at the end of the term, instead of taking the train to London I sat in the hall and waited. My instructions were to sit there till Mr. Cheal came for me. It was a dismal half hour waiting for Mr. Cheal. Letters from Papa had begun to arrive with five cent blue stamps postmarked Washington, D.C. America was a very big land on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. Papa had written that very soon we would all be together again; Gor-gor, De-de, and I were to go over some time for our summer holidays. Meanwhile what? I wondered if I would see my brothers during these holidays. They were going to live with Sir James. I wanted to be with Sir James. But, as Papa had said, three children were too much to wish on any one household, and he was especially anxious for Gor-gor to be with Sir James because he hoped

## ECHO OF A CRY

Gor-gor would become a doctor. I was going to the Cheals in the country. It would be healthy. I would learn 'to do things around the house'. The Cheals were simple people and did everything themselves.

A car came up the pebbled drive. A door banged. I fixed my eye on the front door as the bell rang. A tall man came in. He was dressed in a brown suit.

'Hullo.'

'Hullo.' He had nice grey eyes and a brown moustache.

'Ready to go? It's a lovely drive down here. Where are your bags?' The trunk had been sent ahead, I explained, and this bag was to go along with me.

As Mr. Cheal had said, the ride inland from the sea through the rolling green of the South Downs and to Crawley was lovely. Crawley is a small town near the border of Sussex and Surrey on the main road between London and Brighton. We drove through Crawley and out along the main road.

'Nearly home now,' Mr. Cheal said as we passed a field with a windmill in it, another vast field with rows of little trees lined up neatly, and field after field of dahlias also arranged neatly in rows and in blocks of colours. A huge board said: 'Joseph Cheal & Sons Ltd. — Nurseries.'

'What's nurseries?' I asked, as the only nursery I knew was the room at home.

'That's us. We do landscaping. These are nurseries for plants, trees, flowers, and everything we can grow.'

We turned in to the left. A big white gate was open and the sand-coloured drive reached out straight ahead as far as I could see. There was a red-brick house on the right and we stopped at an opening in the tall hedge that smelled very sweet. A straight gravelled path led to the door of the house past a green lawn with flower beds in shapes of crescents and circles.

## GROWING THINGS

The door was open and three people stood on the step. I recognized the tall thin lady who came down the path to greet me.

'Hullo. I'm Auntie Jo. D'you remember me?'

'Yes,' I replied, shaking hands. 'How d'you do?'



'You remember Granny, don't you?' Yes, I remembered her. 'And this is Auntie Elma.' She was more robust. I looked at these new aunts and the man who had fetched me, whom I was to call Uncle Arthur. Off and on, as members of their family came and went, I acquired several more aunts and uncles.

Auntie Jo took me upstairs to my room. It was very neat and on each wall hung a text from the Bible. I found texts everywhere over the house, in cut-out letters strung on a cord, painted in water colours and framed, burned into plaques of wood, and in fretwork in most unexpected places.



## ECHO OF A CRY

On the wall opposite my seat at table was a framed text in water colours. A spray of burnt orange wallflowers filled the left half of the paper; a large *O* nestled among the leaves and petals. The text was 'Occupy Till I Come'; the *I* in the same orange as the flowers. I read the text as 'O-cup-y till I come' many a time, and at each meal, but never knew what it meant.

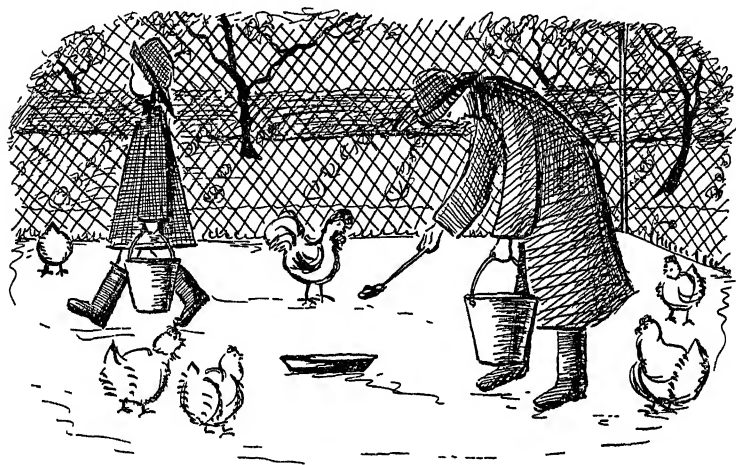
I made friends with the pets of the family more quickly than with the family itself, for they were a reserved people. Toby, a small black and brown terrier of mixed ancestry, followed me around from the moment of arrival. He worried the cat which spent most of its time curled up on Granny's lap or at her feet; once in a while Toby managed to arouse the animal to arch her back and spit at him. These encounters were watched superciliously by the parrot from its perch in the window of the dining-room, which served also as the family living-room. The parrot was a large bird, red and blue with a touch of yellow on the wings, and vociferous though unintelligible. Thinking of the parrot in *Treasure Island*, I expected lively oaths to issue from the bird, but nothing stronger than 'Poll, pretty Poll!' came forth.

One of my minor chores was to take the parrot out of the room every morning. I put it on its perch on the back lawn, well out of earshot so that it would not disturb the after-breakfast Bible reading and prayers. Mr. Cheal, at his end of the table, read a short excerpt from the Bible as prescribed by the Scripture Union Notes. He was a tall big man, quiet and kindly, with gleaming white hair, whom we all called Grandpa. Although I never got to know him well, seeing him seldom except at meals, his presence could be felt all through the house. It was a good feeling to know he was there. It occurred to me one morning, when he was reading the story of Abraham, that Mr. Cheal was like Abraham who 'walked with God'.

## GROWING THINGS

After the reading we knelt on the floor by our chairs, and Mrs. Cheal said a prayer. It was never a prayer out of a book as in church or at school; she spoke simply, and from her heart, as if in conversation with God.

Grace before meals was said by one member or another of



the family; as in the prayer, the words were spoken spontaneously. After I was accepted as one of the family, sometimes Granny nodded at me to say grace at tea. Had I then known how to give thanks beautifully, as in a grace I heard many years later: 'Supply the wants of others, O Lord, and give us grateful hearts', I would have used it. As it was, I don't think I rose above such words as 'Thank you, Jesus, for this nice tea. Amen'.

My day at the Cheals' started many hours before breakfast. Auntie Elma and I mixed pailfuls of a hot brown concoction and took it round to the chickens and ducks, dished some into pans in the rabbit hutches, and left a portion for the goats. More often than not we had to don

## ECHO OF A CRY

high rubber boots, mackintoshes, and rain hats to make these rounds. The smell of the chicken runs made me slightly ill. Nor were the rabbits and goats very savoury, but their personalities made up for much that assailed the nose. Father William, an old rabbit, was so weighed down by his years that he seldom moved out of his hutch, but sat in a corner blinking at the antics of the little rabbits in the next hutch.

The goats numbered three, a mother and young. After breakfast I took them to pasture in a meadow beyond the garden, in which three iron pegs had been driven into the ground for tether. The shortest way was across the lawn, involving, however, much tugging past flower beds. It was really easier to take the longer but smoother route by the drive. To the left of the lawn there was a small pond and a brook, winding through a rockery and connecting with a larger lily pond at the other end of the garden. A small bridge spanned this rivulet. On one of the days when I cut across the lawn with the three goats in tow, one goat decided to go over the little bridge, another headed for a flower bed in the opposite direction, and the middle one, slow in decision, reared and pulled. Hanging on for all I was worth, I found myself at the edge of the pond still trying to persuade the goats all to go in the same direction. For a long moment they tugged. I tugged. Splash! Three goats gambolled off in three directions, leaving me in the pond.

That evening, after making the rounds of the chicken huts to collect eggs, I went out somewhat resentfully to fetch the goats and to milk the big one. I performed the task grimly, for I hated it. That was to my disadvantage, for it is practically impossible to aim straight into a pail in milking a goat with anger in one's heart. The rage did not abate when I went afterwards into the kitchen and was reminded by Auntie Elma of the importance of being 'faith-

## GROWING THINGS

ful in little things'. Oriental placidity was completely lacking.

Monday was wash-and-bake day. Auntie Jo and Auntie Elma spent the whole day in the brick-floored kitchen, the former laundering and the other mixing, kneading, and baking. I helped to hang out the washing and enjoyed watching over the pans in the oven, awaiting the moment when the fragrance of the bread began to fill the whole kitchen. I learned each step in bread-making and eventually also to turn out a few fancy pies and cakes. Thus in a small way I fulfilled my parents' injunctions.

Papa also had another purpose in sending me to live with the Cheals; he hoped that I would become interested in the profession practised on their many acres and in the offices of the firm. In this I proved a disappointment. I took long walks all over the nurseries with Toby at my heels, watched the men at work, jumped ditches, counted saplings, looked at acre after acre of flowers and shrubs, ate a good many apples, plums, gooseberries, cherries, and loganberries, but was essentially a spectator in all but two things.

The process of grafting fascinated me. I watched a great many slips being grafted on to small trees, the neat cut made by the sharp knife's edge on the branch, the precise little push of the blunt end under the upper layer of bark, the slipping in of the new shoot, and the bandaging of the whole in a piece of sackcloth and string. One of the gardeners let me try my hand at this grafting and afterwards I returned many times to watch the growth of the trees I had helped to fix.

The other attraction was the row of greenhouses in which seeds and shoots were nursed, and where special plants were grown that could not stand the English weather. Among these were the orchids, the first I had ever seen.

The number and species of orchids, and some of their

## ECHO OF A CRY

long rippling names, made up the sum of my botanical knowledge. Orchis and Cypripedium reminded me of couples whose joys and misfortunes we had followed in mythology. Here in the greenhouses I found a whole new legendary realm filled with elegant creatures with orchid names: Ophrydineae, Cephelanthera, Epipactis, Ophrys, Malaxis, and Odontoglossum. This enthusiasm for the greenhouses, and their plants and ferns, led Uncle Arthur to build a small greenhouse in the kitchen garden. I then spent a lot of time experimenting with an assortment of shoots and seeds within this glass frame, inspired by two potted orchids presented by the greenhouse gardener. A seed from every fruit we ate at table was promptly put into earth in a little pot and watched anxiously for weeks. I also started vegetable marrows, cucumbers, and tomatoes under glass. Auntie Jo and I became firm friends when she let me keep some of her cacti in the greenhouse. She had a fine collection in her room, though all were on the small side, but they expanded later into quite luxuriant growth in the warm air of the new greenhouse.

Because of an urgent need of boxes and shelves for this new project, I became a nuisance around the worksheds, where I went in search of pieces of wood and also tried to make things at the carpenter's bench. Uncle Arthur again came to the rescue and arranged a corner of the woodshed behind the house as a 'carpentering shop'. Additional tools and nails of specific length had to be pleaded for with long persistence, a much quicker method than waiting till I had saved enough from my pocket money. Financially my resources were low, mostly dribbled away in penalties. The most obnoxious of these fines was exacted for spilling at table. Depending on the size of the spot on the tablecloth, a halfpenny, penny, or sometimes ruinously tuppence, had to be dropped into a small collection box on the sideboard

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in the dining-room. This little box was one of a multitude distributed by the China Inland Mission for their work overseas and on the side of the box was pasted a picture of a little Chinese girl, whom I happened to resemble. It irked me no end to throw my pennies away in this manner. The little girl on the box just went on beaming.

My attitude toward visiting missionaries was therefore a bit coloured by this vexatious penalty. Many of them used to come to stay or spend the day with the Cheals. They were of all nationalities and all engaged in 'saving the poor heathen'. It may have been my prejudiced imagination, but they seemed much too satisfied with themselves and always sang the hymns at Meeting House much louder than any of the congregation. This occasionally produced hideous results when two or more happened to be visiting.

We went to Meeting House twice every Sunday, once in the morning when only a few people rose to speak, pray, or read a selection from the Bible; the other meeting was in the evening when Auntie Elma worked hard behind a wheezing organ and played for hymn singing. Auntie Elma's name was a shortened form of Gulielma. She had been named after the wife of William Penn. When at Meeting House her tummy punctually rumbled from hunger fifteen minutes before recess, I took to thinking of her as 'Gooli-Gooli-Elma'.

Sundays were always very quiet days, dead days. Through the sessions at the Meeting House and the long hours when it was forbidden to play, sew, or even to fill a pot of earth in the greenhouse, I looked forward to the moment after tea when Auntie Elma lit the gas lamps with a taper and the day was nearing its end. As the Bible was the only book I was allowed to read on Sundays, the copy given to me by Auntie Jo soon showed the marks of frequent thumbing. I skipped a great deal because a great deal seemed very

tedious. It was not irreverence but the appalling solemnity of Sundays that made me feel that one could have too much of a good thing. I had a deep respect for the clear strong sincerity of the family with whom I lived, and the respect was often near to awe of their simple belief in God. One could only accept that such firmness of faith was possible. The words of Jesus were quoted to me so often and His presence seemed so real in the household that I half expected to see a figure, such as in the pictures in my Bible, come walking up the garden path.

On Sundays Mr. Cheal took his nap in the drawing-room. In this room were kept the souvenirs presented to the Cheals by missionary friends and relatives, bringing into this Quaker home the incongruous note of an oriental bazaar — peacock feathers in brass vases among bowls inlaid with mother-of-pearl, carved frames, shells, a murderous knife, scarves, and a flute. Here also were stored the books of the household. I still associate the dry airless smell of that unlivid-in room, faintly tinged with the scent of sandalwood from a carved Indian box, with the *National Geographic Magazine*. Several bound volumes of this magazine were lined up on a bottom shelf in that room, and squeezed beside them were a two-tome work on the Spanish Inquisition and *Sara Crewe*. Sara must have strayed on to that shelf by mistake. I wept copiously over her tribulations, progressed to complete absorption in the pictures in the *National Geographic*, and concluded with my hair rising in terror over the engravings of the torture instruments of the Inquisition.

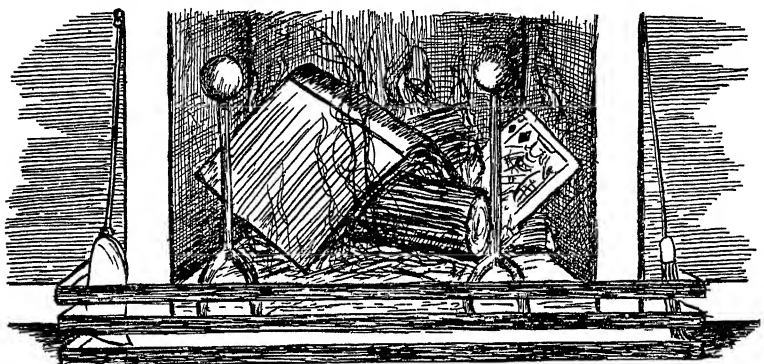
I brought back some books from school. Granny found me in the window seat reading H. G. Wells's *Outline of History* and immediately confiscated it.

'It's a wicked, wicked book!' she said, shaking her head.

## GROWING THINGS

'Oh, Granny, please may I finish it? I'm in the middle of the crusades. Besides, I've already read the part you don't like.'

Granny paid no heed. I never saw that copy of the book again. Perhaps its fate was the same as the jack of diamonds



in a frame which had been sent to me for Christmas. It constituted, with a pack of fifty-one other jacks of diamonds, the apparatus for one act in a box of conjuring tricks. When the frame was held one way, a thin layer of sand covered the card and gave the semblance of an empty frame. A selection was then made from the deceptive pack by one of the audience; the magician turned the frame upside down with a few abracadabras and, hoping that the sand had filtered off the card, whisked off the cloth to reveal the jack of diamonds snugly framed. The novelty of the trick wore off very quickly, so that Granny's tardy discovery of the cards came as a rather silly anticlimax.

Card playing in any form was in her estimation a frivolous and wicked recreation. She built a fire and burned the jacks. I watched their funeral pyre and thought of Dido. It was all very wasteful; I could not decide which was more wasteful — Granny's fire that ordinarily was never made except on



extremely cold days, or the printing of so many jacks of diamonds for the sake of one trick.

Soon after H. G. Wells disappeared, I took up a book that had many points in common. Winwood Reade's *The Martyrdom of Man*. Had Granny known of its contents, it also would undoubtedly have vanished. She glanced at the title, but its air of Victorian frenzy must have in some way reassured her. In spite of its pessimistic tone and passages that enjoyed overmuch their own lugubrious plaint, the book impressed me deeply. The descriptions of the life of the people in ancient Egypt and on the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates, the glorious opening chapter on the Nile valley, and the personalities of Alexander, Mahomet, and a score of others, leaped to life for me. Although the continent of Africa was given a central place, and the pages at times seemed too small for all the ideas which spilled from the author's pen, it was just such features that appealed to me and gave me a new slant. A sentence in the book — 'These then are the elemental lands: China, India, Babylonia, and Egypt . . . history begins with them' crashed like a thunderbolt through the many terms of concentrated English history at school.

I knew very little of Chinese history, and what I did know was mixed with legends and tales told to us at home. But all at once it dawned upon me that things had been happening in one part of the world at the same time that the people in another country were going about their business. This was obviously true in the present, but the realization that this had been going on from the very beginning of all time was something that had never occurred to me. The land masses drawn on separate pages of our geography prep books began to fall into place and to become connected with each other. No longer were they just ink outlines filled with dots and labels, but plains and fertile valleys, mountains and deserts,

traversed by gigantic rivers and tiny tributaries, dotted with lakes and inland seas, and enlivened with millions of people digging, sowing, reaping, working, eating, sleeping, and praying. Where the sun shone hottest, the peoples' skins darkened; and in colder climes, where people bundled themselves up to their noses, their skins were pale or ruddy. When a people like the Egyptians had learned from experience about their crops in relation to the height of the waters of the Nile, when they had learned how to calculate and plan, and arranged to exchange the products of their land and their skilful hands for those of a neighbouring people, there was time then to cultivate the arts of peace — creating and decorating, and enjoying themselves. And these countries in the East and at one end of the Mediterranean had early reached this stage and thus were the first civilized peoples. Again and again, however, when a people reached a high peak of development they had an urge to dominate their neighbours, and the effects of war eventually destroyed them. No wonder history books told incessantly of war after war.

A bit of ancient China was shown to us in a rather unexpected way. There came to visit the Cheals a retired missionary by the name of Mr. Pym. Mr. Pym was an old man possessing remarkable energy for one with such snowy white hair and beard, and a bent back. It was summer time when Mr. Pym came to the nurseries. Gor-gor and De-de were also visiting the Cheals. When Mr. Pym joined our cricket games, he ran as fast as any of us.

One afternoon Mr. Pym came to the tea table with a small bundle in his hand over which he made mysterious gestures and the promise that we should see the contents after tea. He also whispered to me that he had a present for me which, of course, I could hardly wait to see.

The present turned out to be a miniature New Testament

with coloured pictures. Mr. Pym then laid the bundle on the table. He carefully unwound the dirty cloth that was wrapped like a bandage round what seemed to be a heavy object. A hunk of old stone, weathered, and rough with jagged edges, lay on top of the small heap of rags. We looked at it, then at Mr. Pym, and back at the stone.

'It's a brick from the Great Wall of China!' he said, flushed with pride of ownership.

We looked at the stone again and said nothing. How odd for this little man to have a stone from the Great Wall. It looked much like any other piece of stone and he had carried it wrapped up in a dirty rag half way across the world. What if everyone who visited the Great Wall took a piece home? And he was so proud of having done so!

One day Uncle Arthur brought home another pet — a monkey.

'Oh, Arthur, thee will have trouble with such an animal,' Granny protested.

'Oh, no, I don't think so. As long as you keep him on a chain, he'll be no trouble.'

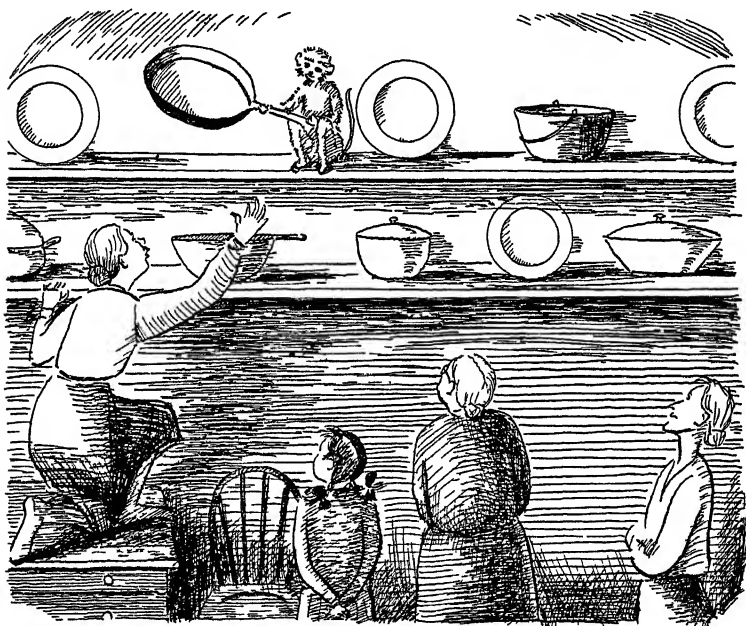
It was fun to feed the monkey and watch it gobble plums, nonchalantly spit out the stones, and store the food in its pouches. On the whole, it *was* trouble, a noisy trouble. The parrot screamed at it on sight. Toby hated and barked at the animal, and the monkey in turn screeched and chattered incessantly. One day it freed itself from the chain and leapt from its perch outside, through the window, and into the house.

'Elma, call Arthur!' Granny cried. We all rushed through the house chasing the monkey. It headed for the kitchen and jumped on to the shelf where the pots and pans were kept. Every attempt to reach it resulted in its gibbering angrily at us and hurling a pot with a clatter on to the

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floor. Before we could do anything, all the pots and pans had been flung off the shelf.

Granny called the gardener's boy whom, for some obscure reason, we called Professor Goodfellow. Penfold, the old man who took care of the family garden, toddled off, still pushing his wheelbarrow, to find the Professor.



Meanwhile Auntie Elma had had the foresight to close the door to the larder, and was now on top of the dresser trying to coax the monkey down with cooing noises.

'Be careful now, Elma', Granny cautioned.

The Professor ambled into the kitchen and touched his cap respectfully. He grinned amiably at the monkey and stood there in the middle of the kitchen, shifting his weight from one foot to the other.

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'Can't you do something?' Auntie Jo said anxiously.

'Yes'm,' he replied, taking off his cap and laying it carefully on the table. He approached the monkey slowly and manœuvred into a position from which he could grab, should the opportunity present itself. The monkey, however, was too clever to be caught in such a simple manner; with a leap it jumped down from the shelf and scooted past Auntie Jo, who dodged out of the back door into the yard. After it rolled the Professor still grinning and undaunted.

Once out of the house, the problem of catching the monkey became much more complicated, for it was now free to roam all over the nurseries and into the great beyond. The chase was given up. We resigned ourselves to the fact that the monkey would return only when it so desired.

Two days later we were astonished to see the Professor ambling along in his loose-jointed fashion with the monkey on his shoulder.

'Up a tree,' was his laconic explanation when we asked where he had found the animal. The monkey was returned to his perch and fastened securely. Granny, however, had made up her mind that this was not the last of the matter. After consulting Uncle Arthur, she presented the monkey to the Professor, whose grin broadened at the gift. At a sign from him the monkey jumped on to his shoulder again and the two went happily down the garden path. We never learned the secret of the Professor's charm on the monkey.

Once a year the town of Crawley, like many small towns in England, was the scene of a fair. It was a gay two days; animals were brought in to be sold or exchanged; stalls were set up in the open place in the middle of the town; coconut shies and try-your-luck counters attracted crowds; and balloons, candy, and toys could be bought for a few pence.

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For days before the fair, caravans from many miles around rolled along the road in front of the house. Most of the gypsies looked sullen and were uncommunicative; the children did not seem as happy as one might have expected. Nevertheless, the idea of riding around the country in a little house on wheels with curtains in the tiny windows appealed to me as a most perfect way to live. In comparison a brick house, in spite of the setting of lawn, pond, and flowers, seemed very dull.

On the last day of the fair I took my bicycle out of the shed, told Toby to stay at home, and rode the two miles to Crawley in fine holiday spirits. The bicycle was an old one picked up by Uncle Arthur after I had smashed up Auntie Elma's machine in a collision with the butcher's boy; I had borrowed the bicycle without permission to deliver some goat's milk to a friend. The resultant punishment fitted the crime and, after the butcher had been refunded for goods spoiled, Auntie Elma acquired a new bicycle, and I a second-hand one. There could be no doubt that Auntie Elma got a good bargain out of my fall from grace; the bell on the new bicycle was sonorous, the tires like cushions, and there was a new lamp, pump, and basket to boot.

I explored the fair very thoroughly, tried my luck with the coconuts, ate a bagful of very sticky candy, watched men bargaining over cart-horses, and looked at the vegetable and flower exhibits in a tent. Among the caravans grouped in the open space, I noticed one which had recently received a new coat of green paint; its windows, edged with a red line, were hung with red-checked curtains. On the steps in the rear a woman sat sewing a plaid garment. After I had ventured up to the caravan half a dozen times or more, she nodded at me and smiled. She looked quite pleasant when she smiled.

'Hullo,' I said.

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'Like my van, eh?'

'Yes, very much indeed.'

She continued to sew a few stitches; rising to look for something, she finally went into the van. Evidently it was



thread she wanted, for she came out again almost immediately, biting off a piece from a reel.

'Want to look inside?'

'Oh, thank you!' I climbed the steps with alacrity in case she should change her mind. There were a lot of things piled up inside, pots and pans, clothes, vegetables, baskets. It was a little disappointing, except for a pot of red geraniums on a shelf. I went outside to have another look from the ground.

'Live here?' the woman said to me.

'Quite near,' I replied cautiously. 'Where do you come from?'

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'Up and down and around,' she replied, smiling and seeming much more friendly. 'Been up Reigate way.'

'Have you been near the Devil's Punchbowl?' I asked, thinking of the black hollow in the rolling country, near Godalming, where Uncle Arthur had taken me on a ride. He had been driving to an old estate in Surrey to arrange for changes to be made in the garden.

'Devil's Punchbowl. Been there many a time,' she replied briefly.

'Where do you go from here?'

'Heading south.'

'Do you all go together?' I asked, pointing to the other caravans.

'Nah. Go our own ways.'

Two children of about eight and six ran up to the caravan and deposited a coconut in the woman's lap. She picked it up, turned it around, examining it, and without a word set it beside her on the step. The children looked at me. I stared back. They turned and ran away.

'They live here?' I asked the woman.

She nodded. Although she was not particularly cordial, I thought that they must have much more fun than most people, going from fair to fair, and in between riding over the country wherever they wished. Without further consideration, I went up to the woman.

'Could I go along with you?'

She looked at me for a long moment.

'What for?'

'I'd like to. You can have my bike. Look, it's over there.'

'Come back later,' she said without further committing herself.

I walked around the stalls again in a fever of suspense. Again I watched the people shying at the coconuts, a few were knocked off the stumps of wood on which they were



balanced. Taking another turn around the green and looking at the caravan whenever I could catch a glimpse of it through the crowd, I saw a man approach it and say something to the woman. She looked up and spoke to him. He took off his cap, rubbed the back of his head, and said a few words in reply; hitching his thumbs in his braces, he turned and disappeared around the other side of the caravan. I edged nearer. Just then the woman saw me and jerked her head.

‘It’s awlright if you want to come.’

‘Oh, thank you!’ My heart jumped with joy at her announcement.

‘Better come up here,’ she said, moving to one side of the step. I climbed up to the top step and sat down. From there I surveyed the people around us as if from a privileged spot.

In a little while the man came back, leading a scrawny brown horse. The two children turned up simultaneously as if from nowhere.

‘Go in,’ the woman said curtly to me. The man was backing the horse in between the shafts and fixing straps and buckles. I stood at the window in front, watching him. When he had finished, he took hold of the bridle and started to lead the horse on to the road, the children running beside him. The familiar street looked different from this new angle; we passed the grocer’s where Auntie Elma often marketed, and where she sometimes got a jar of Dundee marmalade; a few doors down the street there was the shop where Auntie Jo bought wool, next door to the little sweet shop where I went for humbugs and liquorice. Slowly we went past the shops, across the railroad track that ran through part of the town, past the grain merchant, and up the hill. At the top of the hill I looked over the sweep of country, a view so often looked at but to-day greener and fairer than ever before.

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The woman was rattling pots behind me, pushing some things under a bench, putting empty tins on a shelf, hanging a coat on a hook; tidying up, if it could be called that. There was so little space in the van that whatever was moved from one corner only cluttered up another spot.

By evening we were moving along a country road with deep ditches and low hedges on either side. The older child, the girl, picked blackberries as she jumped every now and then across the ditch, to jump back on the road and skip along beside the man. The little boy, meanwhile, had been lifted on to the ledge in the front of the van, just behind the shafts, from which position he turned to stare at me until he got uncomfortable and had to turn around facing front again.

We slowed up when we came into a wooded part. The man led the horse finally into a lane to the left and stopped at a spot bare of trees and bushes. He began to unharness the horse, tied it to a peg that he drove into the ground, and tossed a blanket over its back.

The woman climbed out with some utensils in her hand and I followed her. The two children came up and stared at me again. None of us said a word.

'Sticks!' The woman turned on the children quite ferociously. 'You go too,' she said to me. I followed them as they began immediately to pick up twigs and pieces of dead wood. We went back to the van each carrying an armful. The man was sitting by the wagon smoking a broken clay pipe.

The woman cooked some vegetables in a pot over the fire made with the twigs we had gathered and some old newspapers. There was some meat in the pan smelling suspiciously like rabbit that I had never liked to eat. The children and I ate out of cups; the man and woman used tin pans. After the meagre supper, the woman brought out

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some grimy blankets and gave one to the three of us and tossed another to the man. The girl and boy stood up, each taking an end of the blanket, rolled themselves tightly into it and flopped on the ground. The woman slapped the girl and signalled me to go over to them. She laid the blanket on the ground, lined us up on it, and turned the loose end back over us. There was some pushing, nudging, and tittering among us for a little while under the blanket but, as in the earlier hours, hardly a word was spoken.

I lay listening to the strange noises and rustlings among the trees behind us. It was the first time I had heard the busyness of a wood at night; in contrast, the expanse of sky overhead was wonderfully serene, against which the shapes of the trees stood very black. I fell asleep watching the glow of the man's pipe brighten and subside, lighten and then dim.

The horse's snort woke me the following morning. Before long the man went through the strapping and hitching, and harnessed the horse. We were off again.

Several days passed, most of which were spent on the move. The man got odd jobs along the road, mending a kettle or a pot. While he worked at the back door of the houses, we waited near the van. When we passed chickens conveniently pecking near the roadside, the man managed to catch one; later we ate it. He also helped himself to vegetables and fruits whenever it was practicable, taking them in passing from stalls of a greengrocer's shop, or pulling them out of the earth or from their branches. The children also seemed adept at this foraging.

As I walked or rode during those days, I contemplated this obvious breaking of the Eighth Commandment: 'Thou shalt not steal'. Memorized and recited so many times, it was one of the easiest to understand, yet here I watched a family take from others just what they needed; the chances

were that the people from whom the food was taken did not know, and would never miss it. What was it that made that Commandment a rule to be obeyed unquestioningly? How had it seemed unbreakable as iron when it was taught me, and now so easy to break? Why really was it wrong for these people to steal? They did not seem to be bad people. Watching them, the inviolability of the law against stealing lost some of its might and majesty. To ignore it seemed easy indeed and of little consequence.

On the other side of Lewes in the middle of Sussex, the Law caught up with us in the person of a village constable. By then I was as dirty as the other children; it was a wonder that he could make the distinction.

Uncle Arthur, who came to take me home, was inclined to laugh over the episode after explanations had been made, the gypsies released, and he had given me a severe scolding. Even though we had said so little to each other during those few days together, it was sad to say good-bye to the gypsies. I watched the caravan grow smaller and smaller down the road and half wished that I were still inside.

During the drive back to the nurseries, Uncle Arthur questioned me. What did you eat? Where did you sleep? What did you talk about? Were they nice to you? What made you do such a silly thing?

'Oh, Uncle Arthur, I didn't think!' I said, on the brink of tears. 'I wanted to see what it was like in a house on wheels.'

'Did you like it?'

'Parts of it. But it wasn't as nice as I'd expected. They're not good people. But they're not bad either.' I stopped. I could not explain the confusion in my mind even to Uncle Arthur, a most understanding person. I was not able even to express to myself this sudden discovery of a new dimension about people, which added a complexity and doubts to

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the conventional pattern I had known. It was both an exciting and a disturbing lesson.

'Well, anyway, you're back now. But don't ever do it again!'

When we arrived at the house, I went reluctantly to the living-room where Granny, Auntie Jo, and Auntie Elma were awaiting my return. No fatted calf on this occasion.

'Look at your stockings!' Auntie Elma exclaimed in disgust. I looked down, although I already knew that there were two enormous holes over the knees and runs all down the stockings. I had expected a scolding for my dusty and grimy appearance. What I most needed at the moment was a bath full of hot water and plenty of soap; that, however, was several hours off. The questions began again. I could not try to explain. I looked across the room at the case of butterflies hanging on the wall, blue butterflies from India they had told me when I first examined them, and brown moths, yellow ones, and orange ones, all neatly pinned to the white background, glassed, and framed in a box, hanging there among the photographs of the Cheal clan and texts from the Bible.

'Thee's a wicked little girl!' Granny was saying, her face red because she was so angry. 'Go upstairs and pray to God to forgive thee.'

'I'm awfully sorry, Granny,' I stammered in a most inadequate apology. 'Please, please believe me.' Her expression told me she did not. Turning to go, I caught sight of my filthy hands. 'May I light the geyser for water, please?'

'Do as I tell thee!' Granny said firmly.

So I went up to my room. Aching with shame, I sat on the floor for fear of dirtying the counterpane or the chair. Auntie Jo came up later and helped me to undress.

'I've lighted the geyser,' she said. 'There'll be water in a

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little while. My goodness! You do smell!' She laughed. It was such a relief to hear her laugh.

'I was just thinking that I haven't had a bath since I went away.'

'Did you do what Granny told you to do?'

'No.'

'Why not? You should, don't you think?'

'No.'

'Don't you think you've been rather naughty and caused us all a great deal of worry?'

'Yes, yes. I know I'm awful. I'm sorry about being trouble. Really I am. You believe me, don't you, Auntie Jo? Please believe me. But I can't pray. Not the way Granny does, and you do, and Grandpa, Mr. Pym, and all the rest of them. It doesn't come out that way.'

'Have you tried? Really tried?'

'Yes.'

'Couldn't you then?'

'No. I suppose I did it wrong. In exams and things, when I was afraid, I'd say, "Oh, God, please help me. For Jesus' sake, please help me". I don't think it made much difference.'

'Haven't you ever tried to talk to God? We can't just turn to Him only when we are in trouble, you know. Shall we kneel down and pray together?'

I shook my head. It was no use. Granny talked with God regularly. She was angry. He'd probably listen to her first.

I was lonely in the disgrace that enveloped me like a pall for several weeks. I avoided the house as much as possible and longed for school to open. Fortunately for all concerned it had long ago been arranged that I should spend the next holidays with Sir James and my brothers. As it turned out, I spent the next Christmas and Easter holidays with them in London and at Cottered.

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Cottered consisted of a cluster of cottages, and the fields around them, attached to the village of Buntingford in Hertfordshire. Sir James owned an old red-brick house in Cottered. He went there very seldom since his sons were away and Lady Cantlie had died. Now he sent Nanny and



us up there for part of the holidays and came himself from time to time to see how we were getting on.

Three cocker spaniels were born on the day we arrived. Nanny said that it was a 'good omen', and we each looked after a puppy while we were there. We went for long walks over roads, fields, and muddy lanes, and played in a stone quarry near by. It was in this quarry that Sir James taught us to shoot with the guns his sons had used. He had a firm conviction that everyone should learn how to handle a gun and shoot as straight as practice made possible. Every day while he was at Cottered, we set out from the house with the guns under our arms, the barrels pointing down. The

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importance of this position was impressed upon us by a story of how one day Kenneth, the youngest Cantlie, had failed to carry his gun properly, had tripped, setting off the gun and spraying shot into the leg of his brother who was walking in front of him.

When we arrived at the quarry, Sir James placed three empty tins on a ledge, lined us up at a short distance facing them, and patiently instructed us in stance, aim, and procedure. The crack, ping, and kickback from the gun were surprising.

In the evenings we used to sit around the fire and Nanny joined us with her sewing basket. By the light of the fire and oil lamps she often sang to us. We joined in on the selections from Gilbert and Sullivan, which were our favourites.

'I polished up that handle so carefull-eee  
That now I am the Ruler of the Queen's Na-vee!'

'Dearie me!' Sir James heaved in his chair, wiping his eyes with a large handkerchief as he laughed so much that he cried.

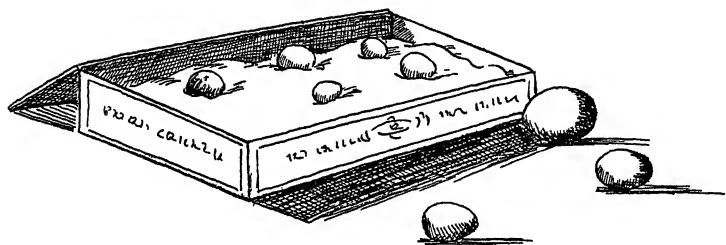
At bedtime we each took a candle from the table in the hall and filed up the stairs. The bedrooms were damp and cold with only one spot of warmth in the beds where Nanny had earlier put a hot water bottle. These strange earthenware bottles, shaped like a loaf of bread, never failed to be either too hot or too cold. On first getting into bed, it was impossible to put even a toe on the bottle because it was so hot; later in the night one woke up with a start, on kicking what felt like an ice-cold rock in the bed.

There was a boy, who lived down the road from the house, by the name of Percy Kingsley. Percy collected birds' eggs and, under his guidance, we began to collect too. He taught us how to proceed about looking for eggs, never to take one out of a nest if it was solitary, how to



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carry them home, and to pierce the two ends carefully with a needle and thus to empty the shell by blowing through it without breaking it. After this difficult operation, the egg



shells were laid in cigar boxes lined with layers of cotton wool and each labelled with a name and date.

On joining Sir James in London, we paid calls on friends of Papa and Mm-mah. There was so much to tell Lady Tuck that we stayed with her several days. Busy as she was with committees, 'callin', and her family, the dear lady found time to take us to Kew Gardens, to the theatre, and to talk to us endlessly, laughing with us over things we thought excruciatingly funny, interested in all the details of school, and a bit appalled at my chores in the country.

'Farmin', she summed up.

'Oh, no, Lady Tuck, only a few animals and a kitchen garden.'

'Devastatin' though for girls. Not fittin'.'

'But I like it, really I do.'

One evening while we were at the Tucks', the whole family gathered for dinner. As it turned out, it was not just a family dinner but a Jewish ceremony. At the close of dinner a maid brought in a pile of hats from the hall. Sir Adolph already had on a black skullcap; the other men each took a hat from the heap in the maid's arms without attempting to retrieve their own. Perhaps almost inevitably Reggie,

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who was large and heavy, put on a bowler several sizes too small for him. No one seemed to think it amiss, but Reggie took advantage of his comic situation by winking, squinting, and puffing his fat cheeks at us while Sir Adolph was reading aloud. After he had finished reading, a silver goblet was passed around the table from which we sipped some wine. Then Muriel read something in Hebrew out of a little book. Her gentle voice was lovely.

Another family we went often to see were the Craies, who lived in Kensington. Mrs. Craies was an old lady and was very hard of hearing, but she possessed a lively interest in everything that was going on in the world. Mrs. Craies was a Greek. Sometimes at dinner there would be dishes from her native land and often several guests to enjoy them. They were writers, painters, musicians, and men and women in politics. Because of her deafness, Mrs. Craies used a telephone contraption that frequently got mislaid, so that her two daughters had grown accustomed to speaking very loudly. Most visitors to the house also began shouting at the top of their voices, so that we found ourselves bellowing soon after entering the front door. This made the parties very lively indeed.

Once in a while, in the middle of a conversation, Mrs. Craies would thrust into my hands the mouthpiece of the telephone tube. Confronted suddenly by this object, I started speaking slowly and quietly to Sissie, the daughter, and screaming into the mouthpiece.

'Don't shout, dear,' Mrs. Craies remonstrated. 'I can hear you perfectly.'

I was astounded to meet men and women who were painters. I did not know that there was such a profession. The few pictures I had seen had all been done by painters who had died, and somehow the idea had entered my head that serious painting, so different from our daubing at

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school, was something that had been done a long time ago. Now I met people who painted pictures. They seemed much like anyone else with the exception of a few women who floated in and out of the Craies' home in strange sacklike



gowns and scarves, and were conspicuous for long dripping earrings. They delivered themselves of lofty sentiments over mouthfuls of scone and honey, and thereafter completely ignored what anyone else had to say.

Sissie took me to look at pictures. The Tate Gallery was a revelation not only for its contents but for the marvellous fact that large buildings could contain room after room full of pictures.

'They're quite different, Sissie! Look!' I exclaimed, my eyes popping out of my head at the paintings in light gay colours. 'Look at those spots! Hundreds of them! Look at that sunlight!' We were in the room of the French impressionists. Each picture vibrated with colour and

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strength. I had only seen 'old' pictures before this, dark and sombre in ornate gilt frames.

Our visits to the British Museum became more frequent as Sissie let me choose where we should go to look. The attraction there for me was in the Egyptian rooms; when I first walked through the rarefied air of those rooms, I had a curious feeling of having seen those figures before. When or where they were made I did not know, but I felt at home with them. *The Martyrdom of Man* with its vivid descriptions of life in ancient Egypt probably had a great deal to do with this reaction. When I finally connected these Egyptian figures in the Museum with what I had read, saw jewellery that they had worn, cloths that enwrapped them at death, furniture they had used, animal gods they had worshipped, tools they had handled, and their symbols and writing, the spell of Egypt had caught me. Fragments and faces which had been partially obliterated by time and weather were in a way more alive than the statues that had been reconstructed. The expression suggested by the erased portions of a face, and even by cracks across it, contained a personal message which the royal figures in their majesty and formality did not try to convey.

Sissie had lived in Peking and also had a fine knowledge and appreciation of Chinese art. She took me to call on their friend, Mr. Eumoforpulos. He lived in a house full of glass cases of Chinese bronzes, clay figures, jars, and animals; and elegant porcelains that had a certain coldness in their perfection. I was dizzy from seeing so many things, but as I passed from case to case, it seemed to me there was music in and around those objects. Distinctly, though in my imagination, there were flutes and strings weaving into drum beats and deep bass notes, and the ringing of clear bells.

Thanks to Sissie, the two holidays in London were

jam-packed with new experiences, so many things I had never seen before, numbers of new and different kinds of people, hints of new and exciting worlds; most of this newness was being shown to me through the old worlds of Egypt and China.

Crashing into this pre-occupation with the ancient world came a letter from America, announcing that I should go there next summer, since I was finishing at Caledonia. Gor-gor and De-de were going too but would return to England to school. Gor-gor had meanwhile finished at St. Wilfrid's and had taken, and passed rather spectacularly, his examinations for Winchester.

The prospect of going to America alarmed me. I did not want to leave England, especially London which had become home to me. What did I know about America? Nothing. In school we had touched briefly on the trouble George III had had with his American colonies; at the cinema we had seen a picture of cowboys and red Indians which had made my hair rise on end; and in *Wuthering Heights* Heathcliff, whose origins were shrouded in obscurity, had been called 'a little Lascar, or an American or Spanish castaway'.

To counteract these rather dusty clues I tried to recollect if Papa's letters gave much of a picture of America. But Papa's letters were usually full of family items. A long time ago, Papa had talked at table about Mr. Wilson, the American President, and something about his coming to London and Paris. At that time there had been pictures of American soldiers marching and crowds waving at them. Papa had gone to Versailles and Paris, but after he came home, he did not talk to us any more about Mr. Wilson.

Recently, however, a book of photographs of the Washington Conference had come by parcel post. In some of the pictures, the personalities of the Conference posed stiffly in black tail-coats and striped trousers in front of buildings

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and scenes in Washington. The glimpses of the city were hardly adequate as pictures of the capital.

Papa had written about going to the White House, which he explained was the American Buckingham Palace where the American President lived who was called plain 'Mister'. I liked that very much, calling it simply a white house and the President 'Mister'. That was unique. But it was only one tiny fact about a huge country. Obviously there was a lot I had to learn about America.



## CHAPTER VII

### THE NEW WORLD WAS OLD

PAPA and a friend met us at the pier when the *Mauretania* docked in New York. We were going direct to Woods Hole on Cape Cod, where Mm-mah and Betty were waiting for us. Our other little sister had come from China, so that this would be a family reunion.

As we had some time before the train left for the Cape, Papa's friend took us riding round the city. We went first to his office in the Woolworth Building, the highest rooms we had ever been in; and from the top of the building we took a long look at New York spread out before us — 'the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them'. Driving up Broadway we gaped again and could not turn to all sides at once to look at all the people, and the buildings that reminded me of the honeycombs from the Cheal's beehives.

Papa's friend was Chinese, but he did not behave like Chinese we had known. He was a little man, but he arranged

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everything we did, and how we should see things, in a very tall manner. There was an air about him of being very busy, even when he was presenting us each with six post-cards. His suit was neatly pressed and someone had polished his shoes very thoroughly. I had cleaned shoes at the Cheals' and was sure he did not bend over to shine his own shoes to such dazzling results.

We were more impressed with the train than with the few hours in New York. Never had we eaten a meal on a train before, and in a dining car with knives and forks and all the equipment. And the waiters were the first Negroes we had met. The one who waited on us was kindly and talked in a beautifully liquid bass.

'Why do we have ice in the water?' I asked Papa. He replied that that was the way they drank water in America.

'Fancy having sweets at the beginning,' Gor-gor remarked at the melon with which we started lunch. 'Fruit to start with. What do we end up with?' Papa told us the fruit was a slice of honeydew melon.

'What a lovely name for a melon!' I told Papa about the cantaloupe seed I had nursed in the greenhouse. He did not seem to grasp what I was talking about and said that I must remember to write to the Cheals.

'What's the matter with this chicken?' Gor-gor asked, prodding the wing on his plate.

'That's fried chicken,' Papa explained patiently. We had never eaten chicken fried in batter.

'What's this? What's this?' we asked all through the meal. We were tasting for the first time slices of candied sweet potatoes, succotash, and corn bread, all of which tasted very good indeed.

'Sweets all through the meal, eh?' Gor-gor commented. 'I like America.' And the ice-cream at the end confirmed his opinion. In England 'ices' were more nearly related to



sherbet and were served in meagre portions compared with the mountain on the dishes before us. I could not eat all of mine; it was too cold. This reminded Papa of a dinner party in Shanghai when ice-cream was first being introduced into China. An old Chinese gentleman, after a first mouthful, put down his spoon and, turning to his host, explained that he was getting old and this excessively cold dish he found a little too chilling. Could he, therefore, request that his portion be returned to the kitchen and warmed up a little bit?

It was evening when we arrived at the station at Woods Hole. There was a long drive along the shore and through the woods before we reached the cottage. Mm-mah welcomed us and Nanny clucked like a mother hen. We went up to have a look at Betty asleep in her room. I found that I was to share a big bed with the sister who had recently arrived from China. She was already asleep, her long pigtail hanging out over the head of the bed. Her face was half buried in the pillow on her side of the bed, so I could not get a good look at her. Sprawled diagonally on the bed, she was peacefully usurping the lower part of my side. I got into bed and pushed. She grunted, moved a little, and soon slipped back into the same position.

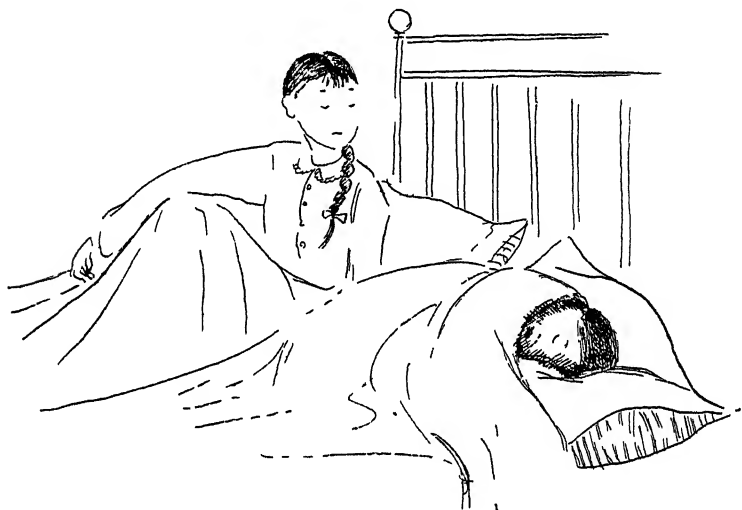
In the morning I woke to find her sitting up in bed, watching me. I wondered how long she had been sitting like that.

'Hullo,' I said, sitting up to have a good look too. We sat for several minutes eyeing each other in silence.

'We got here last night,' I offered conversationally. She stared stolidly at me. Of course there was nothing to say to that obvious remark. 'When did you get here?' I persisted. No answer. It suddenly dawned upon me that she did not speak English. So I repeated the question in Cantonese and

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watched a smile slowly spread across her face. Soon she was telling me about the ship, and the people on it, by which she had come to America, about going to Washington, and finally about coming here where she, Betty, and Nanny went paddling every day. She liked paddling in the sea. I



was so delighted with this flood of information that I wanted to hug her. How nice to have a sister bigger than a baby! What fun we were going to have! But suddenly the spontaneity vanished with the realization that this was the first time I had ever seen this person. Sister she was, but more a stranger. And shyness touched her too, for all of a sudden a barrier seemed to have risen between us. We sat, not knowing what to say.

Nanny came in and told us to hurry and get dressed. She treated my sister as if something were wrong with her, hovering over her as she got into her clothes. When she went to the bathroom, Nanny asked me: 'How do you like your little sister? She's a sweet little thing, isn't she?'

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'She's all right. What's wrong with her?'

'Nothing, dearie. She's just shy. You know, I talk English to her and I think she understands me.'

'You signal so hard. Nanny, of course she knows what you're pointing at. Don't treat her as if she were idiotic!'

Jui-tsung was this sister's name, and her English name



became Julia. Mm-mah called her Julie, and we contracted it into Jay. When she joined us, the family had slowly gathered itself, and for a brief while we were all together. The time was very short because Gor-gor and De-de soon returned to England. We swam, fished, sailed, and caught poison ivy. Some very sporting snapshots of us in action were duly mailed to our aunt in Shanghai.

There was a marine laboratory in Woods Hole where many biologists gathered during the summer to combine their vacations with their work. Among them were several Chinese students and professors who often came to our house. One woman showed us how to press seaweed and other specimens from the ocean; dried and spread out on blotting paper, they made weird designs. This proved a fascinating pastime and we spent many hours wading

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among the rocks at low tide, picking up additions for our collection.

There was a Japanese couple at the lab. We made friends with them but, although they were always very polite, nothing much was ever said. The woman had a way of receiving all questions, statements, and greetings with a 'Zo! Zo!' that discouraged any further attempt at conversation. It is often remarked that orientals are impassive of expression and economical in speech. No doubt there are many individuals who fit this description; this Japanese couple were as good examples as could be found. One day, however, a Chinese professor came to our house and hilariously gave us a complete contrast.

He was staying with an elderly couple at Woods Hole, who, either because of their advanced years or simply because their appetites were not large, served very little food and even eliminated lunch. The professor, who had braved hunger at times in the past, at first faced the situation with fortitude. Weeks passed. One day he could not bear the gnawing pain any longer. He described his distress graphically with sweeping arms and at high tension.

'Ah, Madame Sze, you do not know how I felt. My stomach was empty. Empty! I was weak. I had to do something.' At this point we were on the edges of our chairs in concern for the poor man.

'I go to the market and buy two lobsters. Cooked! I take them under my arm and go to hire a boat.' Hunger had sharpened his resourcefulness. 'I row out into the middle of the water and devour one lobster, tearing it apart with my hands. I eat it all, claws and feet. I pick up the second lobster. Just then a motor boat comes along. Put-put-put. I look up. Ayah! In the boat are my host and hostess looking at me with big surprise.'

We roared with laughter. The professor laughed too,

laughed till he was red in the face and choked at the recollection. After a moment's thought he sobered up and turned to Mm-mah.

'But now I have to go back to their house. I have not the face to do it. What shall I do?' It was a predicament, but Mm-mah, always practical, forthwith invited him to stay to dinner, and suggested he stop thinking about what to do. He returned there after dinner as if nothing had happened. Mm-mah very often had to lend a sympathetic ear to our Chinese friends; she usually could speak to them in their native dialects and this made them feel at home, the officials and businessmen as well as the students, for most of them were homesick, although they did not often say so.

The professor stayed for dinner and made up in some part for his weeks of deprivation; he especially liked the corn on the cob.

'Ah!' he sighed in satisfaction over his third ear. 'I have not tasted it as sweet since home.'

This led Papa into a dissertation on corn, comparing the smaller, sweeter ears of corn grown in China with the larger variety in America. Whether or not the professor was familiar with the corn situation in America, he listened very attentively; and the conversation became quite agricultural as it broadened into a comparison of farm products in America and China, what had been introduced into one country by the other, what further exchanges could be made, and how the Chinese farmer could benefit from some of the new methods in America.

There was another professor in our lives at this time who made quite an impression on us. He taught at Johns Hopkins and was a very good friend of Papa's. He watched Gor-gor, De-de, and me with a quizzical eyebrow cocked in the air. Chinese? English? And now American? He called us XYZ, ABC, and Lemme See.

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'Going to be educated, eh?' he said sceptically after Papa had told the professor of his plans for us. 'Well, there's just one thing you're going to learn: on the day you finish college, you'll have to begin all over again to unlearn everything they have taught you. Lemme See, that'll take the rest of your life, I guess.'

I had no success, however, in pointing out to Papa that perhaps it would be a good idea to profit from his friend's considered opinion — after all, he was a professor and he ought to know — to stop school right away would be saving both his money and our time.

Gor-gor and De-de returned to school and college in England and I went with the rest of the family to Washington. I was sent to a boarding school there. The difference from school in England and the adjustment were painful. What went through my thoughts for the next several years could all be put down in a long row of question marks and exclamation points, the first of which appeared the moment I arrived at the school.

The girls around me all looked grown up. I was amazed at the clothes, the make-up, and the high heels. My own skirts felt as if they had shrunk badly. Conversations centred on 'dates', and I discovered that I was wrong in thinking that they had any connection with a palm tree or the calendar. The way I dressed, the books I read, in fact that I read at all for fun, and the accent from England, would have put me down as a dud had I been American; as it was, what I did and said were regarded as just strange and possibly quaint. It was not by chance that my closest friend for several terms was a girl who, in comparison with the others, appeared to be a severe case of arrested development. Margaret came from Savannah, and although we got on beautifully we had some difficulty in understanding what

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each other said. We managed very well after she got used to my rapid delivery and clipped words, and I got used to waiting for the end of her long slow sentences and bridging the gaps in the middle of words.

Our group was made up of girls from the deep south. I



laughed over and liked the names: Lavinia, Mary Lou, Betty Jane, Kay, and Virginia. They fitted well the young southern belles who came to the nation's capital to finishing school.

'Honey, doan' cut yo' hair,' Lucy urged me, taking a large bite of Hershey bar.

'No, don't,' echoed the others in the room. We were waiting for the supper bell.

'It's cunnin' that way.' A peculiar use of that word; nevertheless I was determined to cut off my pigtail. I felt silly with it down my back beside girls with their hair up or short.

' 'S different, sugar.'

'So cute.'

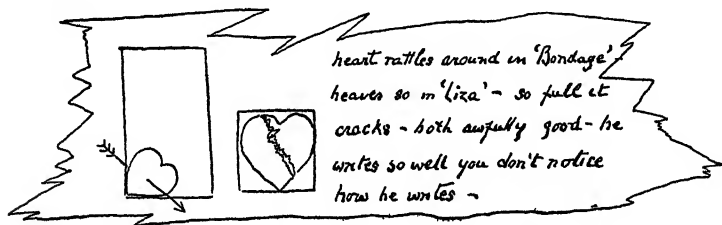
'You look so Chinese that way.'

'It's sort of picturesque.'

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That fixed me firmly in the decision to dispense with the pigtail, and in the next vacation I left it at a hairdresser's on Connecticut Avenue. On waking up each morning I used to shake my head vigorously and rejoice over the loss of the pigtail, wondering at the same time if my father had been as happy over cutting his queue. When he was a young man, he had had to wear a queue, as all Chinese were forced to do under the Manchus as a symbol of submission. When the Manchus were overthrown, what a shedding of queues took place all over the country!

To leave mine at an American beauty parlour with a French name stood, however, for no breaking of shackles. I was still just a schoolgirl, one of the kind that kept a journal. No, not a diary. Nor did it have a lock on it. It was just a note-book filled with smudgy comparisons of books and miscellaneous items on the authors. At certain points it was easier to illustrate with a diagram than to struggle with words. I read *Of Human Bondage*. Poor Philip! Double burden of Mildred and a club foot! I read Mr. Maugham's first book, *Liza of Lambeth*, which struck me as more powerful and more poignant in half the space. In the note-book the comment came out like this:



In that the note-book was full of comments, it was personal; but there were no reports on what I did or whom I saw. The only personal reference in it appeared as 'Airlie would approve', or 'Rotten — but Airlie would like this'. The note-book was a refuge. A refuge from what? I don't



think I knew. There were things I wanted to run away from. There were things I could not run away from.

School was a place in between; no longer somewhere where one was happy drawing maps, reading history, playing games, and planning gardens, which as far as one could see would go on indefinitely. School was now a step to something else, college and then what? The things now being learned smelled of the classroom and were remembered for the sake of passing a quiz; Latin, which had been taught me at Caledonia at the same time that I learned English, and which I had enjoyed, was now a period heartily detested. What did it matter how many parts Gaul was divided into? This petulance stubbornly persisted even when one had to admit secretly that Virgil was rather magnificent.

Saturdays were open days; groups went downtown shopping or to the theatre, some stayed at school in the empty halls and silent rooms. Once in a while I went home on Saturdays.

'Hullo!' I greeted Papa on the stairs. When I went into Mm-mah's room I met first with a scolding. That was not the way to greet my father. No, it was not, according to one way. In another way it was friendlier, and that was how I had felt.

Papa at this time was deluging me with things to read — pamphlets, papers, reports, books, volume upon volume on politics, medicine, agriculture, international law — all the contribution of committees, conferences, professorial research, and friendly publishers, that had piled on his desk from the mails. Papa was always saying at this time that I must 'do something useful'. I often wondered if the avalanche of print 'to look over some time' was aimed towards that usefulness. Futilely I dipped into the material. How very stupid I was. What a heap of things I did not know and had never heard of. What a gap between Latin

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verbs and all this. I came across a report of a dentists' conference; shortly afterwards, a volume on automotive nomenclature. It did seem then that Papa hated to throw anything into the wastepaper basket, but his desk had to be cleared fairly regularly.

There were a great many people in Washington who were 'At Home' in those days. Cards had to be left, or one must drop in for a minute. Even when there were no 'At Homes', cards had to be left, a top corner turned down if you drove up to the front door in person. What would happen if Harris turned down the corners? Harris was our Negro chauffeur. He lived with his mother in a section of town cut up by narrow, dirty streets lined with two-storied broken-down houses. It was not far from where Martha, the cook, lived with her husband and mother. Martha was evidently in another stratum in the opinion of the rest of the household, for Martha's brother was a gardener at the White House.

One day Mm-mah wanted to send something to Martha's mother who was ill. Harris drove me to the house. The hall was dark, the little room beyond dim and full of smells because only a faint light and a mere gasp of air came through a tiny window looking out over an alley. Was the room so small or were there just too many people in it? Their faces blended into the dimness, and when I said 'Hullo', all around the room rows of teeth flashed like fireflies in the evening. All these people were at home but one did not leave a card with one corner turned down on the rickety table in the hall.

Mm-mah went to see Martha's mother too. And afterwards she went to one of the 'At Homes'. Martha's mother spoke to her in quiet soft tones. At the other house people shouted at her and gushed over her. So many old ladies trying to look young, their cheeks daubed into screaming blushes, whether hatchet-faced or round like a plum pudding. Grey-

veined hands, flashing with jewels that blinked greedily, clutched glasses of prohibited liquor. Around each neck taut with aged sinews, hung the inevitable string of pearls, rolling gently from side to side or lying horizontal on a bolstered bosom. Ugly, ugly, silly women.

In contrast, the deaconess at school stood like a granite mountain, dark in her black high-necked dress. Her face had the same well-scrubbed look as the Cheals'. Perhaps the spirit could cleanse in more ways than one. When by chance I once saw the deaconess without the white starched cap she wore every minute of the day, it was as much of a shock as if I had seen her undressed.

'Wouldn't you like to join our class?' she said to me one day in the hall. She was on her way to the group that was preparing for confirmation.

'Well, I er . . . er. . . .'

'Come along with me now. We're meeting in the library to-day.' Without further ado I was led to the class; when I realized that the confirmation service was not far off, it made me very nervous.

'Please, Deaconess, may I speak to you?' I went up to her after one of the sessions.

'Why, of course, dear,' she replied with her far-away smile. 'What is it?'

'I don't think I'd better do this. I don't feel right about it. You see, I'm not a Christian and I guess one has to be one to be confirmed.'

'What do you mean, child? You're a Christian, aren't you? Aren't you an Episcopalian?'

'No, ma'am. I'm not anything.'

'Don't you belong to any church?'

'No, ma'am.'

'Haven't you been baptized?'

'No, ma'am.'

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'Then of course you can't be confirmed. But, child, what have you been taught at home?'

'Nothing about church or God . . . or things like we've been memorizing. Papa always said that everyone should believe what he wants, that we should respect them all. If we wanted to be Christians, that would be all right too, only we had to know clearly why we wanted to be Christians. You see, I've never quite been able to make up my mind.'

'Why don't we go up to my room and have a little talk?'

'Thank you, but I don't think I want to talk about it, at least not now. You see, I haven't made up my mind yet.' I was expressing it all very badly and the deaconess was getting a little impatient. 'Is it so important, I mean does it really matter . . . belonging to this or that church?' I blurted, trying to explain my confusion.

'You can choose, of course, dear,' she replied rather coldly. Again I had said the wrong thing. She was taking it all very personally. I had to say something to make her understand.

'Deaconess, I went to church and everything in England, all sorts of churches. And I lived with very religious people. I like church all right. You see, I think my father was right about people choosing what they wanted to be. It doesn't seem to me to be so different, the ones I've seen. . . .'

'How do you know?' she rebuked me gently.

'No, of course I don't know all about it, about all the different kinds. I was thinking of all the kinds I had been in, and the Tucks and the Cheals. They're friends. I meant . . . well, I meant . . . what I mean is, well, isn't God the same for everyone?' I never found out the answer.

As the terms passed, and at the end of each school year, we agonized through the examinations for college. I began to grow very uneasy. College meant four more years of classrooms, of teachers, of girls. How was it different from

school? Could I ask Papa to change his mind? Would he understand? I sat down and wrote him a long letter telling him I did not want to go to college, and please could I go somewhere to learn to draw. Sissie had said that learning to draw was a very necessary preliminary to being a painter.

'You're wanted in the front room,' I was told one day as I sat composing a paper for a class on the next day. What had happened? Something must be wrong. One was never allowed visitors at that hour and on a weekday. Going to the front room, I saw Mm-mah sitting very straight on the hard sofa. Papa was walking up and down the room. No greeting. Papa's face forecast thunder and rain.

'Mm-mah!' I greeted her tentatively.

'What is this about not going to college?' Papa plunged into the purpose of the visit.

'I've been thinking . . . we've been taking those examinations to go to college. I've been thinking I er . . . er . . . don't want to go to college.'

'You've been thinking!' The way Papa said it reduced all the strenuous mental weighing I had done in the past few weeks to rubbish. This was not going to be any good. I wouldn't be able to explain. There would be an explosion. I was afraid of explosions.

'All these years . . . ' Papa reviewed the years. He must have forgotten what one did at school and the gap between what was taught and how much one digested. It was very neat. He expected this and this and this to have been done for me; and this and this and this to have penetrated my brain. I hoped there would be no allusion to the size of mine. Not at this moment, *please*. All this was too important. Too important for what? I thought it was important for myself. Papa evidently thought it was important, too, or he would not be striding up and down the room.

Again the point was made that I was receiving the same

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education as the boys. There was no doubt there were advantages in going to college. But my query was directed at those four years as preparatory to becoming a painter; could I not proceed directly to art school or apprenticeship under some painter? Painting as a hobby then, Papa conceded in a deft



manœuvre, but he could not conceive of it as a career. All the plans, thought, money that had gone into sending me to school, was this to be the goal? It must have seemed a dreadful anticlimax to Papa, but I could not explain. We compromised in an agreement that struck me as similar in spirit to some of the international documents Papa had signed, with red ribbons and seals attached. I was to graduate from college — with a gesture Papa granted me the choice of which college — after which I could go to art school for one year. It struck me as a hard bargain, but Papa had had more experience in that sort of thing, and one year was better than nothing.

The head of the school in Washington was a Wellesley woman; she also happened to be a Wellesley trustee. Long before I faced the last college entrance examinations, I was

therefore irrevocably an applicant for Wellesley. The glossy photographs of the prospectus presented campus views of pseudo-Gothic buildings with a lake in the background, an angle on the square, reliable-looking library through magnificent trees, and the neat balconied interior of the hall in one of the dormitories; glimpses of students striding flatfootedly to class, bent over microscopes, lined up in caps and gowns, and striking theatrical poses behind a row of footlights. They were a truthful set of photographs; if anything, the campus looked even better, particularly on arrival in the middle of a New England autumn. The leaves splashed incredible bursts of colour over the campus, changing daily, and so soon mellowed to dun and the wet brown of early winter.

I threw myself into campus life with hitherto undreamt of energy. Possibly some hidden hope drove me to believe that this increased tempo would hurtle me through the four years with greater speed. Not unlike Huei Tai, a compatriot in the Freshman class, in her adventure with a bottle of medicine.

Huei Tai had turned up at Wellesley much too brilliant for her sixteen years, and completely at sea in the new life. Coming direct from China, Huei Tai had crossed the American continent alone, deciding finally not to enter a co-educational institution and winding up on this campus in New England. Round, short, her face wreathed in a grin when that vague look of bewilderment did not momentarily blanket her countenance, Huei Tai had lived in Germany and France in her childhood, and spoke both languages fluently. Her English was guttural and disconcertingly Teutonic.

I was sitting in the library one rainy day, making notes on the extraordinary behaviour of an amoeba, when I looked up and saw Huei Tai enter the room, looking as if she had just taken a plunge in the lake.

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'Good Heavens! How did you get so wet?' I whispered.

'Walked up from the Vill,' she replied hoarsely.

'Haven't you got an umbrella?'

'*Nein.*'

'Raincoat?'

She shook her head. I signalled her to go out into the hall where we could talk in more normal tones.

'You can't sit around like that,' I said. 'You'll catch your death. We'd better go down to the Vill again. You change. And we'll go shopping.'

We picked our way through the puddles back to the village where the Freshman houses were located. After stopping at Huei Tai's room for her to change, we went to buy her paraphernalia. A half hour later we emerged from the shop with Huei Tai in a bright yellow mackintosh, galoshes flapping, and a large umbrella. The cold she had already caught laid her up the next day under doctor's orders to stay in bed and take a teaspoonful of medicine three times a day.

I did not see Huei Tai for a couple of days. The Freshmen were in the middle of the sixth week quizzes, and anxiety pressed us to unusual concentration on notes and lectures. One evening a girl from Huei Tai's house rushed into my room.

'Something's wrong with Huei Tai. You'd better come.' As we rushed down the street I couldn't help wondering why Chinese names were almost invariably mis-pronounced. Were they so difficult? Or did people automatically conclude before trying that they were not going to be able to say the names? Here was Huei Tai being called 'Weighty', and another Chinese girl in the class whose name was Bing Chung Ling was usually called 'Bung Ching Lung' or any of the possible variations of a comparatively simple name. It was perhaps inevitable that someone should call her 'One



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Bum Lung' and that she did not catch on till her Junior year. But what could be wrong with Huei Tai? Pneumonia?

'Did you call the infirmary?'

'Yes. They said the doctor'd be down soon.'

Huei Tai was lying in her bed when we entered the room. Two long braids, usually coiled over her ears like ear phones, lay on her bosom, adding to her forlorn appearance. She looked sick, her face a greenish tinge.

'What's the matter? How d'you feel?' I asked anxiously.

'Oh!' she moaned. 'I feel so ill.' I felt her forehead. No fever.

'What did you do? Did you take your medicine?'

She nodded weakly and turned her face to the wall. 'I took it all,' she said weakly.

'All? You mean all at once?'

'Yes.'

'Good Heavens! Why?'

'Ach!' she groaned. 'I feel so ill. I thought if I took more medicine I would get well quicker.'

What was there to say? Incredible crazy logic out of this German-French-English-speaking Chinese girl! And she'd probably wind up with a Ph.D.

There was a flaccid joke on campus at that time, one of those revived each year for the benefit of gullible Freshmen: that a Ph.D. stood for 'Pretty Hasty Departure'. This had its measure of truth as had other campus quips of the same ilk, another being to interpret Wellesley's Latin motto: *Non Ministrari Sed Ministrare* as 'Not to Be Ministers but to Be Ministers' Wives'.

From the ranks of Freshman anonymity, even the first degree seemed far off indeed, an echo of the old feeling that school would go on for ever. Was that what we had come to college for? A degree? What did it amount to? It soon became apparent that it was up to us individually what a

degree would stand for at the end of the four years; one could get by with very little work, or spend long hours in the library, faithfully attend every lecture, and even strive for honours. Or one could do a reasonable amount of class and book work, then take a deep breath and discover the world outside of the campus. The proportion was difficult to gauge, not that one consciously measured time and how to fill it. How different the decisions of what notes to scribble in class, how many books to consult, what questions to ask of the professor, and of oneself. And how varied peoples' ideas of fun!

There were five of us from China at Wellesley during the first two years. The graduate student, concentrating in the Hygiene Department, was conscientiously aware every minute of diet, exercise, and especially breathing.

'You breathe all wrong,' she informed me one Sunday, when the five of us were gathered to cook a Chinese meal.

'What do you mean?' I asked. 'Doesn't everyone just breathe?'

'There are different ways of breathing,' she replied with authority and spoon poised in the air. 'Look!' She stood up and patted her diaphragm as she drew a deep breath. 'Very important to breathe from here.'

Huei Tai giggled and placed a fat square hand on her tummy.

'No!' the graduate student said sharply, already in the role of teacher. 'Not there. Here.' We obediently inhaled deep draughts of oxygen and heaved our diaphragms. Thelma, a shy, pretty Shanghai girl, touched herself daintily, almost timidly. She reminded me of the small ivory figures of Chinese women that were once used by doctors. Modest patients had only to point to the spot on the ivory figure corresponding to the area of their affliction. Thelma might have been one of those patients, had she lived at an earlier

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date; however, here she was at Wellesley, seldom uttering a word but not missing much. One just accepted that she would so continue through college and, probably, through life. She surprised us. On Thanksgiving Day of her Junior



year, Thelma eloped. The campus was in a dither over the news, and our Chinese group was eyed suspiciously as if, one by one, we were all going to do the same.

Bing Chung Ling wore gowns Chinese style, though cut large and full for comfort; in winter she added padded robes, so that by February she rolled around campus like a woollen ball with American galoshes on her feet and a home-made rainbow scarf around her neck. Bing's hair was cut in a Dutch bob that flew out in all directions, giving her the appearance of sudden fright except that an amiable toothy grin was quick to brighten her face. She wore black-rimmed spectacles and was studying psychology.

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'You work awfully hard,' I said to her one evening, as we came out of the library. She spent most of her time in the science room.

'I must,' she replied. 'I have so much to do. I want to do graduate work too.'

'Don't you think you should take time off once in a while?'

'What do you mean?'

'Go into Boston, look around, or this sort of thing.' We were walking along the path by the lake. I pointed to the people skating.

'It's such a waste of time!' she exclaimed.

'It's healthy and it's fun.'

'We get plenty of exercise.' I had to admit that Bing was right. It was no wonder Wellesley girls wore flat comfortable shoes, considering the amount of ground to be covered each day. It was not by chance that, after the first month or so, most of us had developed an ungainly stride.

'Will you teach when you go back?' I asked Bing.

'I don't know.'

'What made you choose psychology?'

'It is a new science.'

We had been in the same elementary course and Bing had progressed to experiments with two white rats, inexplicably named Napoleon and Abraham.

'Did you ever feel like an experiment yourself, Bing?'

'Like Napoleon you mean?' She giggled as she mentioned her white rat.

'Yes, like Napoleon. We're experiments here at college. Sometimes I wonder what on earth I'm doing in an American college.'

'It's a great opportunity.'

'I know, Bing. What I was wondering was how much good it's going to be, educating us like Americans.'

'There are not many who have such an opportunity.'

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'Yes, Bing. We'll never hear the end of what an opportunity this is. We're going to hear it for the rest of our lives. The main thing is what are we going to do with the great opportunity.'

'It *is* a great opportunity,' she murmured. There could be no doubt about it. And Bing did not think along tangents. She had the gift of specialization and she knew what she wanted.

I did not have Bing's tenacity, nor Weighty's talent in languages; nor did it seem likely that I would follow Thelma's example with any of my acquaintances at Harvard or in Boston. My aim was a vague notion to see and do and read as much as I could get into four years. Consequently I spent a good deal of time off campus, picking up bits of American history at Concord, counting the seven gables in Salem, listening to concerts for the first time, and renewing acquaintance with the ancient Egyptians in the Boston Museum. In contrast to school in Washington, I now knew more northern girls and a few from the Middlewest. The American horizon was broadening for me. What an extraordinary land! What makes an American? My friends had English, Scotch, Dutch, German, and Polish names. But they were Americans. They did not speak the languages of their grandparents and forefathers; they spoke English, or rather American. The American language was also extraordinary, full of quick phrases and slang words that truly hit the nail on the head. Some slurred their words, others dropped half of them; the *r* was ugly when emphasized as in the speech of some of my friends, and the flat *a* distinguished the girls from Maine.

Among the few eating places in the village of Wellesley was a tiny counter, aptly named 'The Hole in the Wall'. There was just enough room for a person to come in and sit down at the counter, at which not more than seven or eight

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people could sit at a time. At the back Dan, the proprietor, stood behind a board on which sat his cash register and enough room for a plate or two. Behind him sizzled the hamburger or eggs. His speciality was a 'Klee', a steak sandwich. I was sitting on one of the stools eating a Klee one evening when a Negro girl came in and sat down beside me. I recognized her as we had passed each other often on the campus and smiled at each other in that tentative way, when one knows someone by sight but has never exchanged a word. I knew she was an upper-classman, and thought she was pretty. She told Dan what she wanted to eat.

'Want some ketchup?' I passed her the bottle, sticky around its neck.

'Thanks.'

'It's a change eating here, isn't it?'

'Yes. It's more peaceful. You're in Severance, aren't you?' she asked, referring to one of the dormitories on campus.

'Yes.' In my second year I had been assigned to Severance. 'Where are you?'

'I'm in Norumbega.'

The door was pushed open by two girls who were laughing over a joke. It must have been a very funny joke indeed. They were laughing so hard that when they slid on to two stools, the one nearest us heaved a deep sigh as if she were worn out from laughing.

'What d'you want?' the one nearest us asked her companion. 'Want a Klee or hamburger? Hey, Dan!' She turned to give him their order. Abruptly she got off her stool, pulling the other girl toward the door. 'Let's get out! I'm not sitting by any damn nigger!'

Everybody seemed to hold their breath for a moment. Then Dan shoved a plate along the counter, muttering something about people who thought they owned the earth. I

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felt like apologizing, but what to say? What was the use? She must have felt my discomfort for she looked round.

'It's all right. I hear that quite often.'

'I'm sorry. It's awful. They don't know any better.'

'If they don't want to sit by me they don't have to. And they didn't,' she said quietly.

We paid our bills and went out.

'Going back to campus?'

'Yes.' It was a clear night, the air very clean and cold. We walked past a big white house, one of the Freshman dormitories. The lights were all on.

'Is your home near here?' I asked her.

'No. I come from New York.'

'I don't know New York.'

'It's a grand place. It's got everything. Of course, things happen there you hate like mad. But it's a big city. More room in it for trouble.'

'You mean like to-night?'

'Yes, but much worse. It's mild just being called "nigger".'

'Like "wop" and "chink".'

'Yes, kinda, but I think there's more hatred when people use "nigger". More hatred and more fear.'

'In Washington when I heard the southern girls talk about "nigras", I thought it was just their bad pronunciation.'

'A lot depends on the way it's used.'

'Do you mind being called "coloured people"?'

'It's better than "nigger".'

'When they told me to use that expression, it seemed an odd way to put it. It still implies inferiority of a kind, doesn't it, as if "coloured people" were not up to others? When you think of it, we're all coloured except the pure white man. And is there such a thing?'

'Plenty of people think so!'

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We were now at the heart of the campus, passing the low temporary structure of the administration offices, temporary, that is, for many years since the fire, and until the new buildings would be completed. In front of us, the dormitories of Severance and Tower rose on the hill beyond the open space like a huge bowl in the middle of the campus. Many of the lights were on in the rooms in the dormitories, and across the green some tune from a gramophone floated faintly towards us.

'It's nice, this time of evening,' she remarked.

'Yes.'

'It's so safe and secure here on campus. So safe and secure you sort of forget about things outside.'

'Yes. It's very like school all over again.'

'Well, I never went to that kind of school,' she said quietly. I felt embarrassed at having said that, yet she had not meant a rebuke.

'I've had an awful dose of private schools. It wasn't till I came here that I realized I'd been lucky in a way. Great opportunity and all that sort of thing. It's only in America you see large numbers working their way through college as you are. I think it's wonderful. I hadn't known about that before. Now that I've learned, it worries me.'

'Why?'

'Realizing I've taken so much for granted. It's a funny mixed feeling of being given so much, yet feeling I've lost something.'

'I know. There's a line in one of Shaw's plays about that. . . . "When you learn something you have a sense of losing something".'

'Certainly is true. But what I meant was not the sadder and wiser feeling. It's the feeling of having wasted something; time, money, opportunity, whatever it may be. Wasting must be the most awful loss of all.'

'I know what you mean.'



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'That line's in *Pygmalion*. Or is it *Major Barbara*?'

'I don't remember.'

'I only know a couple of the plays. I think it's in *Major Barbara*. She was a cause gal.'

'All Shaw's plays are cause plays.'

'Yes, I suppose they are. Major Barbara being a Salvation Army girl makes it more frighteningly cause gal.'

'Yes, but if you care enough about anything you've got a cause!'

'Guess that's true. We're cause people, whether we like it or not.'

'It's a degree of caring, caring enough to work for something, to fight for something, whether it's for yourself or other people. I guess I may talk more strongly about it, being a Negro. All problems of inequality, discrimination, exploitation, and what-have-you are related. You must have it one way or another in your country.'

'Plenty, but in other forms. There's "squeeze" and other kinds of commissions, big and little. They've become accepted as a matter of course.'

'I've heard about "squeeze" . . . as a quaint custom or in a funny story. I guess it isn't so quaint or so funny in practice.'

'Racial discrimination turns up in China rather differently from other countries. You find it in its most poisonous form, I think, among the foreigners, the westerners. There are individual exceptions, of course, but it's they who make the racial difference count. It's the white and the coloured issue in another part of the world.'

We had reached the bottom of the hill where she had to turn right to go up to her dormitory.

'Well, I leave you here,' she said. 'Let's get together some time.'

'Yes, let's. Good night.'

'Good night.'

## THE NEW WORLD WAS OLD

I went often to an old square house covered with ivy in a quiet section of Brookline. The houses there stood far back from the street in the middle of lawns enclosed by walls or hedges. Mrs. Cunningham was a tiny spry old lady. She reminded me of a wren. I went with her to concerts and to



see Mrs. Gardner's glass flowers, and whenever I came in to visit her, she treated me to lively commentaries on the plays that visited Boston before going on to New York. The comments included detailed descriptions of what the actresses wore, their make-up, and their pronunciation.

Mr. Cunningham was a retired lawyer. He spent most of his time in his large, panelled library. He urged me to read American writers, the early Americans, prescribing Emerson, Melville, Hawthorne, and many others. He talked of Dr. Channing, the Adams family and the James family. After I had tasted in nibbles some of the fruits of New England culture, I told him that they seemed to belong on a branch of the same tree as the British writers of their time.

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'In their style, attitudes, subject matter, and the whole feel of them . . . the subject matter in essays, for instance, and in the flowery oratory.' I fumbled to explain to Mr. Cunningham. 'They even quote Latin as much as the English did.'

'Ah, my dear! There was a difference. You must read more. It was inevitable that those men should hold the classics in high esteem. Inevitable, perhaps, that they admired the great poets of England. Impossible to appreciate Emerson without knowing your Coleridge. Know Coleridge? Read much of his?'

'No, sir. Only "The Ancient Mariner" well,' I admitted.

'These early Americans also established firmly the roots of our culture. They set their feet in a new direction. Here, let me see if I can find a passage I'm thinking of . . .' He picked up a book from the table and flipped a few pages. 'Here it is:

. . . "We have yet had no genius in America, with tyrannous eye which knew the value of our incomparable materials, and saw, in the barbarism and materialism of the times, another carnival of the same gods whose picture he so much admires in Homer . . . Banks and tariffs, the newspaper and caucus, Methodism and Unitarianism, are flat and dull to dull people, but rest on the same foundations of wonder as the town of Troy and the temple of Delphi, and are as swiftly passing away. Our log-rolling, our stumps and their politics, our fisheries, our Negroes and Indians . . . the northern trade, the southern planting, the western clearing, Oregon and Texas, are yet unsung. Yet America is a poem in our eyes; its ample geography dazzles the imagination, and it will not wait long for metres."

'Emerson wrote that in 1842. He sensed the direction, and I don't mean the geographical direction.' Mr. Cunningham-

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ham put the book down on the table, picked up a pipe and began to fill it from a jar at his elbow. I watched the fine long fingers deftly push the shreds of tobacco into the bowl.

'Emerson was in many respects much closer to the part of the world you come from than we are to-day,' he said, dropping the match with a thread of smoke still curling from its head on to a pewter plate.

'Because of the China trade?'

'More specifically the influence of oriental thought. I don't know what an oriental might think of how well Emerson understood and interpreted Hindu philosophy. Nevertheless, he absorbed the teachings through translations current at the time. No telling how widely their influence has been felt through his works.'

'It's a rather exciting thought, isn't it, of the things that sailed on the trading ships almost by mistake? The influences, philosophy . . . they took up no space but they've lasted longer than the cargoes. I must say, sir, however, that I think reading Emerson is very hard work.'

'Oh, I agree with you! He is heavy going at times. But I think you'll find it worth sticking to. Don't believe you'll ever find light reading following a man in his search for and discovery of . . . er . . . shall we say, the harmonies of existence.'

In Mr. Cunningham's library there was a book by Frederick Douglass; the story of a man from his origins on a Maryland plantation, the son of a white man and a slave, told in his own words. Douglass had fought courageously for social and economic equality for his people. It set me wondering again about the Negroes in America. I knew it was a burning problem, worse in some parts of the country than others. It seemed far removed from this peaceful house in Brookline. Could I ask questions? Would this dignified old

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gentleman tell me politely but firmly that it was none of my business?

When I accompanied my friends to tea in a Bullfinch house on Beacon Hill, I wondered how the matter could ever be brought up. Here was the setting of graceful living, unruffled by outside problems; a bit prim, perhaps, but one sat up straighter, talked more carefully, held one's head higher in that atmosphere. And behaving this way, one seemed to look over the Common and the common people.

Into this genteel world, which attracted me while at the same time it made me uneasy, came Bill Greene, who taught English at Harvard and three times a week at Wellesley. Tall, lanky, and self-conscious, he was supposed to teach us something about putting words together. In class the rows of girls evidently disconcerted him. His discomfort manifested itself in such rebellious gestures as throwing his books on the desk on stalking into the room, sitting slouched in his chair, and heaving his large feet on top of the desk. In this position, he settled down to a monologue on any topic that happened to come into his head. After the novelty wore off, few of us attended class regularly. In his conferences, however, Bill Greene conscientiously picked our themes to pieces and gave us pertinent advice.

'So you're going in for "litra-chow",' he grinned. He had asked me what I was reading. 'American litra-chow and codfish noblesse. How d'you like them?'

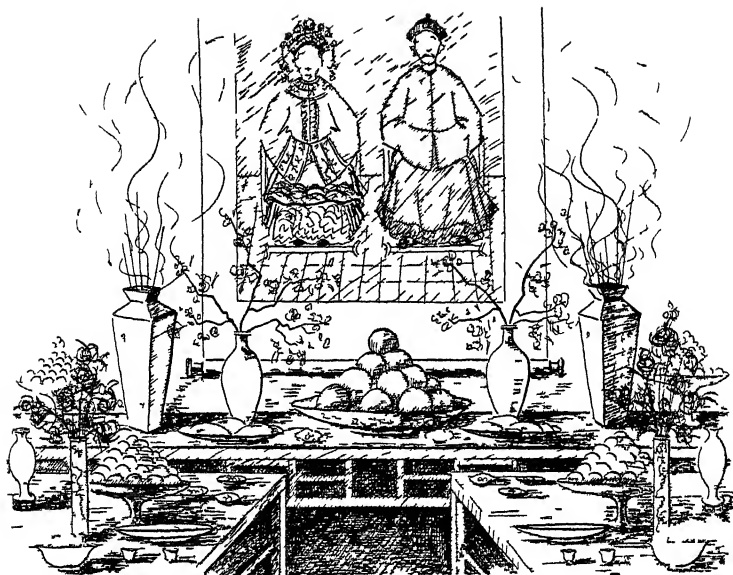
'Very much. I'd like to read some living authors though.' This was more to his taste. He offered valuable suggestions. Bill Greene was one of those young Americans who had spent a long enough, and short enough, period in England as a Rhodes scholar to return to America with his feathers ruffled slightly the wrong way, ready to stand up aggressively for home talent with a stickler's pride that otherwise would have enjoyed indiscriminately the writings of English and

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American authors, and with little inclination to draw the national line. However, Bill Greene was certainly a fine antidote to Plato's *Ladder of Love* and *The Good Life*, which constituted a year's study in a companion English course. He was a fluent talker about books and writers, easy to listen to after one got used to the home-made terms that he thought very clever indeed.

In the middle of my four years at Wellesley, our family reshuffled again; it was becoming a habit. Papa and Mm-mah went back to China and, shortly afterwards, the family settled down again in London. The carbon copy letters headed by 'Dear All' started circulating once more among us. I was told to stay and finish college. I finished in haste and packed up as soon as possible, after selling the cap and gown I had purchased fourth hand, and receiving the piece of parchment tied with a blue ribbon.

I laid the diploma carefully at the bottom of my trunk where it reposed until the bottom fell out. Not knowing then what to do with it, I presented it to Papa. It eventually went back to Tientsin among a lot of other papers; with them some years later, it crackled in a Japanese bonfire.



## CHAPTER VIII

### THE OLD WORLD WAS NEW

As the years passed there had been fewer and fewer photographs of our branch of the family on the wall in my aunt's room. Individually, we seemed to forget about filling out the record, and our family were so seldom together that group pictures were rare. When we did gather, so many groans greeted any suggestion of a photograph that Papa soon dropped the matter. The space on the wall was filled in with baby pictures, of our youngest sister who had been born in America, and of the babies of various cousins, all at the stage when one baby looks exactly like another. I noticed that when my aunt referred to these photographs in her room, she took proper notice of their cuteness and sweetness in an anonymous sort of way without naming

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any of the infants. In an occasional expansive mood she remarked that someone had told her that so-and-so's child was unusually clever for its years, and added vaguely how nice that was for them.

After the formal call which had been entertaining rather than awesome, we had many opportunities to get better acquainted. Knowing how much my aunt liked photographs I took some of her, for which she posed willingly and prettily. Sitting down, she arranged herself carefully, smoothing out the folds of her dress, setting her face in the expression she wished to leave to posterity. In preparing for some of the shots she seemed undecided whether the result should be informal, pleasantly smiling, or restrained and in the full dignity of her years. As the mouth pursed in thought prior to decision, I could almost hear the monologue going on inside that ancient head. She insisted on some of the pictures being taken with the set of teeth in and some poses without, so I now have half a dozen snapshots flashily displaying those monstrosities, and companion prints in which her mouth is puckered up as if the old lady were sucking a piece of sour candy. Her most endearing feature was a pair of expressive eyes that half seemed to let on that she knew all this was an act, but after all what a masterly act, and what fun we were having.

'We could do this very often,' she suggested.

'Well, certainly as long as I am here,' I replied.

'But you are not going away!'

'Yes, soon.'

She thought this over slowly, undecided whether to be annoyed or to brush it aside with a flourish of charm that she was able to turn on and off with ease.

'Now, why do you go away? Come and live with me. Life is so simple: eat, sleep, and play mah-jongg! You like to play, eh?'



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'Yes, occasionally. But I'd be no good among the veterans here. I wouldn't want to play day after day, and hour after hour. That must get to be like smoking opium.'

'Ah, that is a vice indeed, if you get the habit, though people tell me it's very pleasant. But why must you go away again? What will you do? Much better stay home with me. Of course you will. We shall have good times together. Well, now that is all decided, let's go inside. I want to show you what I've been sewing.'

Often when we were together, my aunt reminded me of a French family I used to see while I was in Paris. And when I had been with that French family, they had reminded me of home. It had been a curious experience discovering how close certain French customs were to ones I had known at home. And yet it was in France that I had realized fully how far away I had gone from my own country. It was in France that someone had said to me: 'Ah, but you are *déracinée* — uprooted!' It seemed an apt way of putting it, and irrefutable, if one insisted on pigeon-holing by nationality.

When I was invited to dinner with the French family, sitting down to table I had the feeling of never having left home. The generations were arranged around the table in order of seniority; they made the same kind of conversation as at our table, the same kind of comments about members present and absent; and they had the same attitude, semi-economic, semi-religious, about the family system. And then there was evidence of that practical streak for which the French have the expression *à la mesure*; how it took me home!

At one end of the table sat the matriarch, who might have been the sister of my old aunt. They would have appreciated each other but they would have fought like cats.

'She seems to be a very sensible woman,' my aunt remarked when I told her about the old French lady. 'But

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why were you in France? What were you doing in a French family?’

‘I was only dining with them.’

‘You went alone to France?’

‘Yes. I was in Paris, and then in a little fishing village on the Mediterranean called Bandol.’

‘What were you fishing for?’

‘I didn’t go to fish. I was painting down there and also partly for the warmer climate. I wasn’t well.’

‘I don’t see why you had to go to France.’

‘The family were in London. France was near. I wish I had been able to travel all over Europe.’

‘I don’t see why you want to travel so much!’

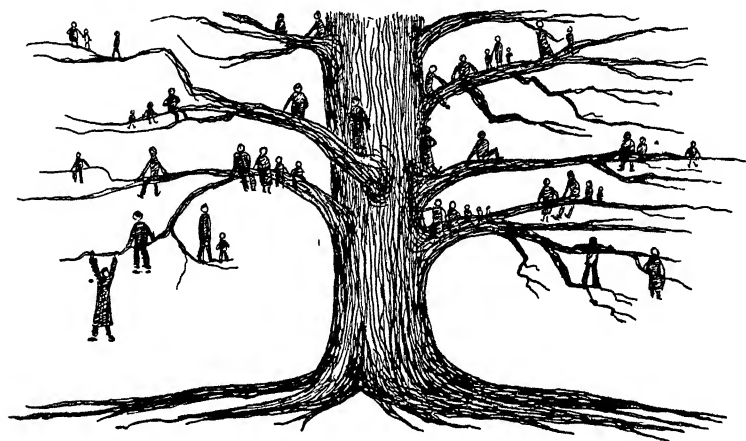
‘Actually I hate the travelling part, but I like seeing the places and the people who live in them after I’ve arrived and unpacked. Didn’t you feel that way when you went on that visit to England?’

‘I was very glad to come home, I tell you. To get home and put on my comfortable shoes, eat the things I was used to, and to sleep in my own bed!’

‘Well, there’s something to be said for that! But I think you might have liked France. You would like it once you got there. One doesn’t feel a stranger in France. I didn’t, even when I didn’t know a soul there. There was so much to see and look at in Paris; after work you could walk on the boulevards or by the trees in the Tuileries, sit in a bistro or on the edge of one of the fountains in the gardens. People stroll and chat around you, no rushing. The little children seemed to have old faces, and the sombre black pinafores they wear go with the faces; like adults, they drink the *vin ordinaire*, the red wine in the carafes on the table, diluted with water. And there are bookstalls to look at, lots of pictures to see, and rides on ferryboats up and down the Seine, the river that weaves right through the city. Every

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now and then you turn down a street into a beautiful old square, or by an old house set back from the street with tall trees around it, and enclosed by a wall. The big doors in the wall are kept closed like here in China. It is a friendly, lovely



city. I understood soon after I got there why people had told me that I would love Paris. They always tell you that, and they're right . . .'

My aunt's head was nodding. She had dropped off to sleep while I had run on about Paris. It was just as well. I would have bored her.

I was home in Shanghai for the celebration of my grandmother's hundredth birthday. It is customary in many families in China to observe each birthday of the ancestors, even if they are dead, up to the hundredth; that being the last celebration, it is an occasion for a large gathering of the family. Like a great many other customs in China, the worship of ancestors is passing. Soon, perhaps, it will be remembered only as a very old and quaint custom.

My grandmother died before my brothers, sisters, and I were born. Her pictures suggest that she was all that I had

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heard her described to be — strong, forceful, and proud. In her photographs the corners of her mouth turn up in a ghost of a smile, discernible also in her eyes, which leads one to imagine that she had also found things amusing.

The day of her hundredth birthday was bright and clear. My elder brother was away, so his wife came to our house to go with the rest of us to our uncle's house. This uncle was my father's eldest brother and, thus, the head of the family.

'Do you think they'd mind if I took my camera?' I asked Papa. 'I don't want to seem like a tourist but I would like to get some pictures if I can.'

'Ask your mother,' he replied with the classic answer of all fathers.

Mm-mah replied with some hesitation that she thought it would be all right, if I did not make myself too conspicuous. Her silences have always been eloquent, and at this moment I could see that she was anxious about our behaviour at the ceremonies. The children of our family had been abroad too long. We had forgotten the *kuei chi*, the manners and correct procedure, expected of us; on such a formal occasion as this one, with the whole family gathered, my mother had reason to be nervous about us. In her way, too, she was used to our kind of replying silences. So, I hoped by showing that I was glad to be with her on this day, by dressing appropriately, and not putting on too much lipstick, she would know that I would try not to disgrace her.

As we drove up to my uncle's house, the gatekeeper ran out to greet us. He had on a clean blue gown. All the servants were dressed in clean gowns, appearing stiffly starched and a bit uncomfortable. It was still the early part of the morning and the relatives had not all arrived. A couple came in, and a few minutes later a small group trooped through the hallway to make the round of greetings.

I went from room to room where the generations seemed

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to have sorted themselves out very thoroughly, the older members in one room reviewing family affairs over cups of tea; the young matrons in another room talking about their babies, and alternating bits of gossip with nibbling of melon seeds that they cracked expertly with their teeth; and the younger group in a third room, impatiently waiting for the ceremony to begin, exchanging comments on the latest movies and teasing each other to pass the time. The men stood in twos and threes, chatting, in the hall.

In the room where the ancestral portrait hung over a group of tables that served as an altar, about a dozen monks were lined up in two rows chanting a slow monotonous prayer. Candles in tall pewter stands cast a flickering light over the tables laden with dishes of fruit, cakes, candy, vases of bright flowers, and incense stands. The air was already heavy with sweet smoke from the sticks of incense.

Chanting in unison, the monks turned toward the centre of the room to face each other, then again in the direction of the altar; kneeling down on the cushions on the floor, they stood up again without missing a beat in their rhythm. The leader then started to walk slowly around the room, followed by the others in single file. Dressed in brand new black robes with bright red cloths draped around them, they all looked alike with their shaven heads and blank expressions. Still chanting, they followed their leader into the garden, where the line walked solemnly along the paths as if to catch a breath of fresh air before resuming the ritual indoors. In large bowls dotted around the garden, paper money in the form of columns of paper boats, stacked one on top of the other, was being burned so that with the smoke the tribute would rise to heaven. The servants tending these smoking piles were having a fine time, joking with each other and paying no attention to the monks.

To my surprise I recognized the figure at the end of the

line of monks. It was my uncle in a gorgeous russet robe with a scarf of orange lined with citron yellow. He was fingering his beads and his lips moved in prayer. I had known that he was a devout follower of Buddhism, but had never seen him resplendent in the robes which marked his rank in some order. I felt very brash taking a picture of him from behind a pillar, but thought that I could not miss such an opportunity. He was magnificent.

As the chanting seemed to repeat itself and gave promise of continuing indefinitely, I wandered around to the servants' quarters. In the kitchen our cook greeted me as if we had not seen each other earlier that same morning.

'What are you doing here, Ah Bo?' She was under five feet and round as a ball. Her face shone with perspiration but the little eyes twinkled, and her mouth turned up in a wide grin.

'Didn't Dai Hsiao-chieh know that I came over to help?' she giggled. I was called Dai Hsiao-chieh, meaning Eldest Missie, because I was the oldest daughter in our family. My sisters were called Number Two Hsiao-chieh, Number Three Hsiao-chieh, and so on.

'What are you giving us to eat?' I asked, looking around. As far as I could see there were more people in the kitchen than food, and they were all as convivial as if they were celebrating their own birthdays.

'Fine duck,' Ah Bo replied, pulling a brace out by their legs from a basket under the table. 'Plenty of other things. This is an occasion which must needs be celebrated long and loud.' She hustled on her small square feet around the kitchen, shifting a pot here, a plate there, and ended up beside the huge slice of wood used as a chopping block. Picking up an iron cleaver, she began chopping some water chestnuts, sharp quick strokes with amazing daintiness and precision, all the while talking about 'the great occasion'.

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'Dai Hsiao-chieh is taking pictures?' she asked, lifting her chin in the general direction of the camera in my hand.

'Some.'

'Take one of me, will you? I'd like to have a picture on this occasion. I'd like another for my son, if Dai Hsiao-chieh would make one.'



'I didn't know you had a son, Ah Bo.'

'Oh, I have two fine sons,' she said proudly, stopping long enough to raise her arms over her head. 'Big sons.'

I took several pictures of Ah Bo, at the chopping block, over the fire, holding a duck by its legs, and one of just her head and shoulders after she had smoothed her hair. She wore her hair cut to the jaw line, straight and oiled, with a clasp on one side.

'Dai Hsiao-chieh, Dai Hsiao-chieh!' a servant called to me. 'They are beginning in the hall!'

Thanking him, I hurried back to the others in the hall. The men were filing before the altar. As each stood before it, he bowed slowly three times, then three times he stepped forward on the left foot and knelt on the right knee, touching

at the same time his right fist to the ground and bowing his head. The older men went first, followed by the younger ones. Then the older women moved forward. As they kowtowed I watched carefully, for the men and women performed differently. The thinner women were more agile and seemed in more of a hurry. I noticed that one stout cousin had some difficulty getting up each time from the red cushion on the floor.

Not quite sure when I should step forward, I watched my mother for a sign. She nodded at me and smiled encouragement. I moved toward the cushion feeling very stiff in the joints. There was something in that moment that recalled my first swimming lesson, when the instructor had said: 'Well, jump in!'

Holding my hands in front of me, slightly to the left with the right hand over the other, I made the three preliminary curtsies, which were not required to be deep but consisted of bending the knees only a little. Between each curtsy I looked up at the portrait. It was an ordinary ancestor portrait on a scroll. It needed simplicity to make it a beautiful picture. Because of the two figures sitting side by side in the picture, it was wider than most ancestral portraits. I recognized the faces of my grandparents. There was a holiday air about them now in their formal portrait for, according to custom, they were painted in sumptuous robes with elaborate designs and intricate head-dresses.

Many hundreds of years ago, ancestral portraits were painted from the subject and each picture was done specifically of the person, or the two people, if it happened to be a double portrait. As the demand for these portraits increased, and profits could be realized in proportion to the number of pictures produced, itinerant painters began to travel from town to village, from village to city, carrying with them ready-made portraits with a space left to fill in a likeness of



the ancestor. The figures in these puppet pictures were gorgeously attired in brightly coloured robes and head-dresses, sitting formally in straight-backed chairs, their hands tucked into the full, embroidered sleeves. The foreground in the pictures suggested the tiled or richly carpeted floor of a palace. The effect was very gala but the figures looked wooden, or what was perhaps worse, as if they had been cut out of paper. The admirable likeness caught by the facile strokes of the portrait painter only emphasized that the body did not belong to the face.

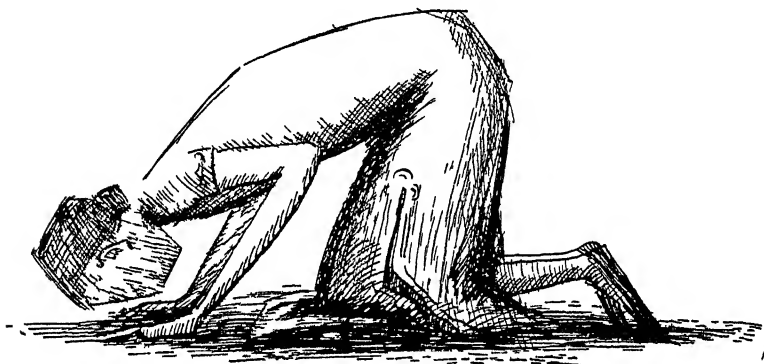
By the time the faces of my grandparents were being painted on to ready-made figures on scrolls, families in China were already substituting large photographs for the portraits. In heavy dark wooden frames, or sometimes in ornate gilt ones so admired as western novelties, these large photographs hung in a place of honour in a great many homes. The subjects in them seemed, in one respect, to come down to earth in a human sort of way that ancestor portraits never attempted to do. Plants in pots, a cup of tea, a water-pipe, and a vase of flowers, were some of the props included in the photographs; and always on the ground, conveniently close by, the indispensable spittoon whose shape was for so long copied from the ancient ceremonial bronze urns.

On completing the three curtsies, I proceeded with the kowtows. Down on both knees on the red cushion, I touched my forehead to the ground three times. The cushion smelled of dust and age. Memory suggested a dozen other times I had encountered that same musty smell in Christian churches far, far away. Even the Meeting House at Crawley, without any cushions to kneel on, had had that dry unaired smell.

In contrast to the bareness and simplicity of the Meeting House, and the clear white light that came in through its plain glass windows, the cathedral at Chartres had seemed

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full of shadows, candlelight, and trappings. The huge church did not seem empty though there were only a few kneeling figures patiently waiting down front in the centre. Organ notes floated over them, through the depth and loftiness of the interior, and into the shrouded dimness of the



shrines at the sides. In four rows on the left a solid phalanx of heads under white veils bowed reverently in that pause between the long preparation for, and the ceremony of, confirmation.

A procession came up the aisle, illustrating as it were the seven ages of man, led by little boys with the men bringing up the rear. They were all dressed alike in red and white; the red skullcaps seemed particularly jaunty in that atmosphere of worship. I've been all wrong about the Catholic Church, I thought, as the trebles lifted into clear song ringing true and fresh through the accompanying basses and organ notes, as the thin lonely voice of the priest gave thanks and benediction, exhorted and prayed. The engravings of the Inquisition on the Crawley bookshelf had too long obsessed my imagination; they now died in the chilly peacefulness of Chartres cathedral. In such a setting of flickering candles, apostolic finery, and kneeling figures, one could believe

sincerely that *Le Bon Dieu* blessed His people. The white veils across the aisle no longer seemed like mosquito netting, but an insignia pure and devout.

I had been startled out of this mood of acquiescence when a box was suddenly thrust into my hands by a pale and austere man holding a rod, a rod that he rather firmly tapped on the stone floor as if to emphasize his presence and its demand. There was no denying the practical moment even in a place of worship.

Now in front of the ancestral altar, too, there had been a perceptible difference of mood when the monks, on returning from one of their rounds, found on each of their red cushions a small packet wrapped in bright pink paper. A servant had discreetly chosen a moment, when their backs were turned, to lay at each place this payment for services rendered. The low monotonous chant, dragging a little from tedious repetition, distinctly picked up at the sight of the little envelopes and proceeded with renewed vigour. No, there was no denying worldly considerations no matter how other-worldly one might strive to be.

God, Atman, or ancestor; Sabbath worship or daily meditation; the Kingdom of God, reincarnation, or filial enshrinement; there are all sorts of ways to pray, to believe, and to act. They seem to have in common the Golden Rule and the Golden Mean. But even the ideal of fairness and moderation has been given the Midas touch, gold to give it supreme worldly value.

Some day, when missionaries start coming abroad from Asia, as they may do in the near future along with other commodities, the teachings of Yoga, Buddhism, Mohammedanism, and all the curious conglomeration of religious practices in Asia, will become less strange and esoteric to the rest of the world, and eventually may be blended with Christianity in its many forms for the benefit of all concerned. Religion may

then take its proper place in the lives of a great many of us; and we shall begin more truly to love our neighbours and not do to them what we would not have others do to us. Put thus in the negative, the familiar precept sounds strange, doesn't it? But that is the way it is expressed in the Confucian classics, in the negative. In that rosy day when we all become better acquainted, and shall more freely borrow and give to each other, perhaps we Chinese will learn to turn the precept into the positive, to break more completely the bonds of our traditional passivity, and *to do*; and people in the West will learn to live more true to scale and find their centre in their own being.

Having participated in Catholic, Protestant, Quaker, and Jewish rites, I had come home to perform an ancient ritual before an ancestral altar. For many years I had vowed that I would never kowtow; it seemed to me an antiquated and worn-out custom. But here I was, anxious to do it properly, curious to experience the whole ceremony, and feeling that on my ancestor's birthday to pay respects to her memory in this fashion seemed not only fitting but a happy gesture.

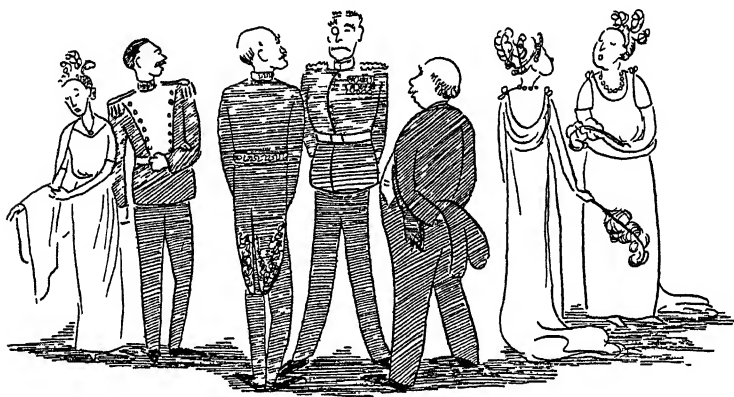
The first kowtow was timidly made, for I had been away a long time. I had not kept to the old ways nor the old precepts.

While we were living abroad, our branch of the family had discarded the formal ceremonies. There were certain rules of behaviour observed at home; we heard a certain amount of quotation from the Confucian teachings, especially the ones shaking a warning finger over filial piety; but on the whole, while we were abroad, we were like other Chinese families which, though not completely westernized, did not observe the old formalities such as the kowtow. Even had we wished to follow custom, the practices would have seemed incongruous and slightly ridiculous in a western setting. Superficial as that may sound, the setting has a great deal to do with the ritual, if one is going to take it at all seriously. The setting is

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helpful to the attitude, and proportionately the attitude can sustain or shatter the belief.

I had found this to be true of ceremonies not strictly religious. At a presentation at Buckingham Palace, most of the evening had seemed impressive and full of interest.



Crowns and imperial trappings in the gilded throne room demanded the accompaniment of uniforms and medals, trains on every gown and ostrich feathers. It was a solemn and gracious moment in a great tradition.

A Japanese prince and princess were visiting the Court at that time. At the presentation they stood shyly among the royal family, a little distance behind the king and queen. The band on the balcony, in an excess of compliment to the Nipponese visitors, struck up a selection from *The Mikado*. Ladies tittered at the slip, and the men turned their heads as if they had stiff necks to see if everyone had heard what they thought they had heard. Everybody then looked down their noses.

It was one of those incredible mistakes that often happen in spite of careful planning and in the face of dignified tradition. While most people present at the Court seemed pained

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at the *faux pas*, if they permitted any reaction to show at all, it had hit my funny bone. I had already been a bit uncomfortable about bending the knee, rigged up as I was in regulation feathers, long kid gloves, and a train. It was fantastic and, I suspected, also comic. One can put such doings down comfortingly to 'experience', but the band's brave attempt at a friendly gesture had emphasized the incongruity of my situation.

I had had something of this feeling of being off key when I first practised brushwork in New York with a Chinese teacher. Although I admired the works of Chinese artists more than any other paintings I had seen, I had chosen to work in oils and in the western tradition, believing that it would be hopeless to jump into the ways of Chinese painting immediately after years in western schools and college. I did not want to turn out mannered imitations of Chinese paintings, and this had seemed likely unless I proceeded first with what came more naturally. To encourage whatever latent inclination I might possess towards working in the Chinese manner, I practised a few hours every day with a Chinese calligrapher. He was wonderfully patient with me.

'Rest,' he would say. 'You cannot force the brush.' So I would go to fill the kettle with water. There was an ante-room where the equipment for brewing and drinking tea was kept neatly stacked for daily use. I dropped a few long leaves of the green tea into the cup and poured the boiling water to the brim, replacing the cover on the cup. The tea was drunk in Chinese style, tipping the cover slightly while sipping the tea from the cup, secure in its small saucer. By refilling again and again with hot water, the leaves retained their flavour well into the day.

'You are impatient,' Mr. Chao said many times. 'You will never make bold graceful strokes in haste. It affects the

hand, and the heart too.' I looked at his fine capable hands and his face which radiated serenity. I had learned to admire his achievement of balance of mind and emotion, his even restraint which could be sympathetic without encroachment, the sense of propriety devoid of smugness. I admired extraordinarily the way in which he adjusted to exigencies of the modern temper, especially as he now lived most of the time in New York where he dealt in antiques.

'I once thought that there would be time for everything,' I said. 'That may have something to do with my impatience now, the feeling of making up for lost time. I know this brushwork takes a lifetime's practice, so does painting in other mediums. Yet I want to learn both thoroughly, so thoroughly that the result can perhaps be a happy blend. Do you think that is possible?'

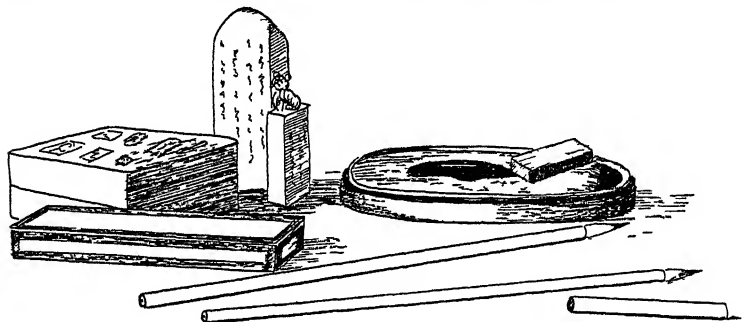
'Why not? It is worth trying. It has been attempted in various ways.'

'There were times in the past, in the China Trade days and in other East-West contacts, when both parties were richer for the exchange of influences. Then there were also the mixtures that weren't so good. Sometimes I think it is all a matter of taste, and there's no telling where taste can lead to. But at other moments I think that if we can only be more thorough in combining our methods, materials, and our points of view, and not be content with surface effects and just the profitable results, we shall produce marvellous and beautiful things. I believe this is possible in paint, and also in other ways, in what is taught in schools, for instance, and what is made in factories, as well as such things as the equipment of a kitchen.'

'Yes,' Mr. Chao agreed. 'I have often thought that there has been an over-emphasis on the art treasures from China. I say this in spite of being in the business. And the Chinese things in museums and collections here have received the

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best of care, possibly better than if they had remained in China. But most people, our own people included, are not aware or have forgotten what a very great deal China has already borrowed from the rest of the world. The exchanging and blending has been taking place ever since the first



contacts. It was inevitable. The difference now is that we must work at it more conscientiously.' He sipped his tea and pursued his thoughts in silence.

'Shall we continue?' he said finally, indicating the brush on the bronze stand. I picked up the piece of ink and dipped it in the water at one end of the ink-stone of slate, and began to grind it gently, mixing the water with the ink.

'Slowly,' he said, picking up the brush. The ink had dried the fine hairs into a sharp black point. He laid the tip in the fresh ink, turning the brush on the stone until it was saturated. Then dabbing it on a dry spot, he rid the brush of superfluous ink, its point now fine and gleaming black, ready for writing.

Watching him and grinding the ink, feeling the thin water gradually turn into the thicker consistency of ink, I could appreciate the first requirement of a calligrapher, quietness, emanating from the heart, flowing through one's body and so to the very finger tips. There is an old admonition not to 'bruise' the ink in grinding the stick on the



stone; not a mere hyperbole, edging into the precious, but a sound statement to be heeded if the ink is to be evenly blended.

Once in a while, as we sipped tea in a rest period, Mr. Chao opened a cupboard and brought out a scroll; some were wrapped in pieces of brocade, others laid in thin rectangular wooden boxes with neat corners and sliding covers. Unwinding the ribbon or cord that further protected the scroll, Mr. Chao began rolling the right end of the horizontal painting as he unrolled ten to twelve inches from the left. Bit by bit we travelled through the landscape, through cloud forms, over mountains, piercing the vapour that enveloped them to dip down into a ravine. For what seemed miles we followed a rapid torrent over rocks, twisting in and out through a wild country barely suggested by a few brush strokes, until we reached a peaceful stretch where the waters smoothed out into a flowing stream. Following the stream, our attention was drawn upward to conical peaks clearly to be seen but obviously a mighty distance away on the horizon; and from these heights we rode the wind, a long dry sweep of the brush returning us gently into the back room of an office in New York.

'Someone once remarked that the best landscapes were ones in which one could live and wander,' Mr. Chao said, satisfied with his flight through the landscape that had been described on paper many hundreds of years ago. 'If you would like to, we might look at this for a change.' He brought out a square album bound in brocade of a geometrical pattern. 'This man's speciality was horses, as you see . . .' Sturdy little horses, white, roan, and black, drawn with a fine brush and tinted, in a variety of positions, grazing, rolling, rearing, and some just standing with necks arched or head raised.

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I had two favourites among the scrolls in the cupboard. One was full of infinite space, very clean and sure: a landscape of tops of mountains in the snow, their white peaks lightly indicated but displaying such solidity. About three quarters of the way along the scroll, a large orange sun marked the climax in this orchestration of mountain tops. The other painting was entirely different, fiercely macabre and touched with a madness which was grim at the same time that it was joyous: a procession of *kwei*, spirits, and skeletons in rags, jumping from one foot to the other, their costumes sparse and fantastic, the expressions crazy wild; and thus they moved across the paper in groups of twos and threes drawn with a brush, dry to a point of shredding, that emphasized the procession's boisterous mocking on the bare silent paper.

The lessons in Mr. Chao's office had a great deal to do with that first kowtow. In fact, I could not bow deep enough in respect to the tradition which had produced such paintings.

The second kowtow was more warmly given for I was glad to be back. Glad too, though, for having been away. Not for anything would I have missed the people I had known, or the things I had seen and done. It was not that my experiences had been extraordinary, but I had met much warmth and friendliness, and seen many beautiful things. Bandol, where I had spent only a few months, was one such interlude. It was full of sunlight, colour, and friends.

I had been told that Bandol was a quiet place on the French coast between Marseilles and Toulon. It was an ideal place to live in for a while and paint. I had a small room, overlooking the market place, in a bright yellow house with blue shutters called the Hôtel de la Jetée.

It was the first time I had seen the south of France and the

first time I had seen daffodils and fruit trees in blossom in January. I walked miles each day, sometimes to paint, sometimes just to look at landscapes in colours bright and pure with the blue of the Mediterranean gaily clashing with the clear, cerulean of the sky. The houses along the road were



white, or pale tints, with bright blue, green, or red shutters. My favourite was a pale pink one with the name — Villa Carlotta. On some days I walked inland, passing ochre farmhouses surrounded by fields of cabbages, and olive trees with twisted black trunks and silver leaves, in earth the colour of rust. On the slopes the slender green leaves of the narcissus bent with the breeze along the terraces marked out by low stone walls. There was a clear strong light all through the day and the air was fresh and sharp, warming towards noon into a pleasant glow. Each day was assuredly the 'Bong Jour' that people sang out to each other in that southern French accent in which so many words seemed to bounce.

I don't think anyone in Bandol had ever seen a Chinese. Everyone I got to know called me 'Chine'. In the market place the man at the fish stall offered me shrimps or an eel

daily, saying: 'Have one, Chine, very good to eat!' And the woman behind one of the clothing stands would hold up a lavender chemise every morning I passed her stall, and invite comment: '*Chic, n'est-ce-pas?*' I always told her: '*Ah, Madame, c'est ravissante!*' I wonder who finally bought the lavender chemise.

When I walked through the town with my painting paraphernalia, children followed me, asking: 'Where are you going, Chine?' 'Painting again, eh?' 'Why do you go so far to paint, Chine, when you've already come from so far away?'

Whenever there was any important news in Bandol, a man with a bugle marched into the market place and blared for attention. Dressed in a dark blue uniform and cap, with red tassels on his bugle, he lent an official air to everything he proclaimed. He would read the tidings of good or bad news and then march off with his bugle.

Good and bad news were foretold me by one of the owners of the hotel, Madame Henriette, who was very proud of her talent for fortune-telling with cards. The deuce of spades was missing from her pack. '*Ça ne fait rien!*' She refused to be deterred by the absence of one card. 'It doesn't matter. It is one of *malheur* anyway, and we can do without that!' Madame Henriette was well on the other side of fifty with dyed hair like corrugated gold, peaches-and-cream complexion from half a dozen jars, and a pair of lovely blue crossed eyes. After you got used to recognizing which eye was looking at you, you could not help adoring her, for Madame H. had a big heart.

Around half past nine every Monday evening, Madame Henriette opened her desk and took out a pack of cards. She signalled to me. We sat down at a table in the back with two glasses of grog, and she instructed me to shuffle the sticky cards. I wondered how many fortunes had been dealt out of

those tired cards. The jack of spades had lost half his hat and the ten of diamonds (ah! great wealth!) was limp from hopeful fingering.

'*Eh bien*, make your wish, Chine!'

'*Oui, Madame.*'

'Don't tell me! I hope it was a good wish — huh?'

'*Oui, Madame.*'

Well, we shall see. I hope it will be a good fortune for you to-night. Do I not always tell you the good news?'

'*Oui, Madame.*'

It was always the same.

'Ah-ha! A letter!' she cried triumphantly. 'A letter from across the sea . . . lots of water. I hope it will bring good news. And a man . . . a dark man . . . a dark woman too, news of them. Unfortunately it is not altogether clear just what . . . but never mind, a letter just the same!'

And every week or so, when the mail came from my parents who were again in America, Madame Henriette would wave the letter at arm's length and scream across the room: 'Ah! did I not tell you, Chine, a letter from across the sea!'

The guests of La Jetée had their meals in the restaurant-bar-lounge with Madame Henriette presiding at her raised desk at the end of the room. We had our assigned places at separate tables along the wall, the rest of the tables being laid for transients. Among the guests was a dentist from Lyons, who never seemed to eat anything but managed to drink two bottles of Pernod a day. He was a huge man with a bald head, always dressed in a dark blue shirt and black trousers. He was allowed to stay on in spite of *petit contre-temps*, because he owned a radio, and the radio had long become common property, indispensable to life at La Jetée.

Late one afternoon I was sitting at the window of the restaurant-bar-lounge. A wind had risen during the day and now, blowing with ominous moan, whipped the palm trees

along the front. The one carriage in town, which usually stood invitingly on the quay day after day, sadly took itself home, the driver on the box and the horse both huddled forward against the wind.

'You do not know our mistral?' a thick voice rolled from the other end of the room. I looked around. The dentist sat alone at a table, his shoulders hunched up, in front of him a bottle of Pernod and a glass half full of the cloudy drink that looked like soapy water.

'No.'

'It may blow up into a storm,' he explained. 'It can be bitterly cold, the mistral, but it may just continue like this, dry and a cloudless sky. Now the sirocco in the rainy season is something different. . . .'

'They're lovely names, sirocco, mistral.'

'I know the typhoon along the coast of your country. That is also a beautiful name but a terrible wind, a cruel wind.'

'That must be what we call *tai-foong*, the great wind.'

'No. You have great winds, but typhoon — it is an Arabic name, or maybe it is Hindustani. Arabic, too, the monsoon name. That is not a nice wind either. It can make a man mad.'

'You must have travelled a lot, Monsieur, or you just know the winds well.'

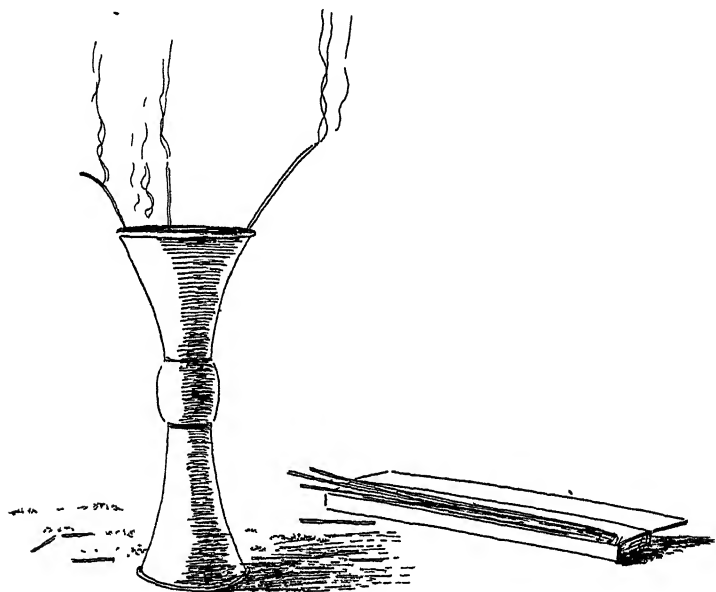
He shrugged his shoulders. I thought if I were a storyteller how intricate a tale could be woven around this dentist from Lyons. As it was, I could only wonder at the unknown circumstances that had brought him here, and that I should be sitting in a fishing village of France, listening to a dentist tell me of the winds, sirocco, mistral, monsoon.

It had been a happy interlude indeed, the better for having been only an interlude. Because I stayed in Bandol only for a visit, I remembered it as quite perfect; and because I had been there, I was glad to go on and see more places, and

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meet more different kinds of people. So it was with this visit home. For having been away, I appreciated it more; and by coming home I held dearer the other places which had been home.

The third kowtow had been quickly done. I knew the ritual was dying. Its significance, and the strength of its en-



durance, lay in the sense of continuity in the group and in their mutual respect and obligation. Hundreds of years had been needed to establish this sense of continuity in our family, as in so many other families in China. During that time, it had also lent strength to the larger and longer thread of continuity in the life of the nation itself. One could not help but respect the long record, but at the same time one was aware of the stagnation that had crept in with the years.

## THE OLD WORLD WAS NEW

Harmless as the ritual was, and glad as I was to celebrate my grandmother's birthday in an appropriate manner, I was more conscious in the third kowtow of its being a symbol of all the old customs and habits of thought that had checked the growth of the nation, and brought so much unhappiness and frustration into many individual lives. As I got up from the floor, I could only think of the tyranny of these customs behind all the impressive antiquity.

The wisps of smoke from the incense sticks curled gently up to the ceiling. Their pungency had at first been rather pleasant but now the sweet heavy scent was stifling. I wanted to fling open the doors and let the fresh air sweep through the hall. Instead, while the others took their turn before the altar, I walked out to the gate. The automobile standing outside reassured me that I was still living in the twentieth century.

A ricksha passed, the coolie shouting something over his shoulder to a comrade eating a bowl of rice at the kerb. A man came down the street ringing a bell and leading a grey ass covered with a blanket. They were stopped by a little girl who ran out of a house with a pitcher. Putting down his bell, the man milked the ass until the pitcher was full. The girl slipped him a coin and carried the pitcher in both hands back into the house. I wondered how many years grey asses had been supplying milk along these streets, and whether this vendor was the son of another who had led an ass from door to door. Watching the transaction, I remembered milking the goats at Crawley; it seemed to have happened a long time ago, and delivering the twice-a-week jar-full to an old lady in the next village might have been in another world. Next I thought of the bottles left at back doors in America, full of rich scientifically radiated milk, hygienically bottled, and distributed by men in white coats. These were various standards of living, an expression one associated with charts

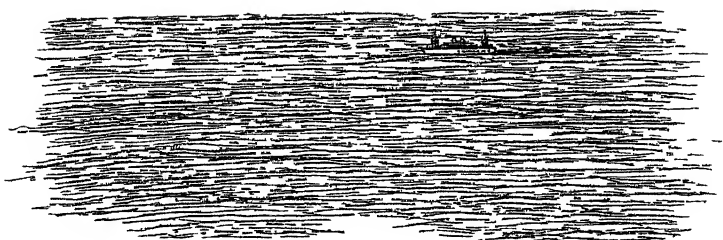


and statistics, but here so vividly illustrated by a portion of milk. If some day bottles of homogenized milk would be left regularly at back doors in China, what other changes would also have taken place by that time? Would the rituals such as I had just left be by then part of ancient history, or would a remnant still linger as a sentimental nostalgia for the past? And would Chinese children and adults get used to drinking milk; would they like it? If they did, how many other changes would come from the new diet, how would it change habits, behaviour, and eventually attitudes?

Occupied in this speculation, I had not noticed that the chanting indoors had ended. A young cousin called to me from the doorway.

‘Your mother is looking for you,’ she said.

I went inside, remembering that Mm-mah had announced on arrival that we would not stay to lunch and for the afternoon. Mm-mah had had foresight and knew where to draw the line.



## CHAPTER IX

### KOWTOW AND HULLO

A MONTH after the celebration of my grandmother's birthday I was on a ship in the middle of the Pacific. The illusion on a voyage of extra hours in the day and the night, pushed into the farthest reaches of consciousness everything that had recently happened and any immediate plans. The seemingly endless expanse of water added to the sense of isolation. Day after day the horizon was bare of any trace of land; when occasionally a speck in the distance grew into another ship, the passengers pointed it out to each other and watched as if the two ships were the only ones afloat on the seas. At night the darkness closed in, suspending us in time and our course, and only the spray and glimpses of white foam churned up by the bow indicated that we were moving on.

We seemed in mid-Pacific to be poised on the mythical line between the two halves of the world, East and West, familiar and convenient labels that we seem to cling to, though they have long become obsolete. They had sufficed when Europe was the centre of the western world but neither the enlargement of that world, nor the circumnavigation of the globe emphasizing the roundness and oneness of the world, had caused the terms to be changed. Here

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we were sailing eastward to America and presumably we were still going to the West.

Did the labels really matter? Yes, if we were going to continue to think of the two halves as different instead of complementary. It mattered if this arbitrary division were going to prolong the prejudices. The diversity of peoples on this earth presented prejudice and rivalry enough without the additional bias of the East and the West. What terms then could we use? The great continents bear magnificent names — Asia, the Americas, Europe, Africa — familiar and convenient for the purpose. Russia with its vast areas sprawled across two continents would continue to be part of each, serving at the same time as a great cohesive force. If the lands which bridged two continents could not easily belong to one or the other, a combination term could be used for their group, such as Euro-Asia for the Near East. Eventually we might become citizens of continents instead of nations. It would be a step in transition to becoming in reality citizens of the world.

Of all the signs that were pointing the direction the world was moving, perhaps the most fascinating was the discovery of what constituted the blood in our bodies. Airplanes, radio, and long-distance telephoning linked with breath-taking ease the different corners of the earth; and now the scientists announced that the red blood that flows through our bodies had been found to have incredibly varied components and magical powers apart from its flow through our veins. And startling though it might be to some of us, blood differed only by types, the way some people are fat or thin, blonde or brunette; basically we all have the same stuff in us that makes us live and breathe and have our being. What a confirmation of our membership in the human race!

The vastness of the ocean around the ship lulled one's

## KOWTOW AND HULLO

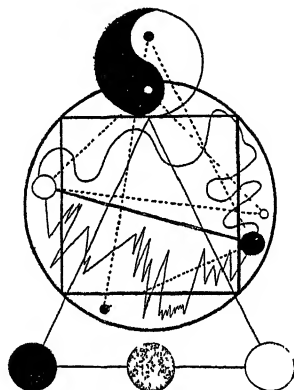
thoughts to wander in this fashion, perhaps rather aimlessly, and to follow them in a sweep as boundless as the horizon. Below deck, the focus narrowed down sharply to the limits of a cabin in which clothes and possessions had been unpacked, only if essential to the daily routine on board. But even in the small circle of oneself, the hypnotic effect of space, and the scale of the sky and the sea, seemed to lead to sweeping rumination. I found myself thinking not of the recent months in Shanghai nor of the months ahead, but jumping back to the years since we first sailed from China, and into large projects in the future that served less as something to work on than as a focus and for the sifting of ideas.

Perhaps many of us find, in a moment of self-appraisal and in remembering childhood, that wherever we have been and whatever we have done there runs through the memories a yearning, or a search for something. Fervently we have wanted to belong somewhere at the same time that we have often wanted to run away. We reached out for something, and when by chance we grasped it, we often found that it wasn't what we wanted at all. There is one part of us that is always lost and searching. It is an echo of a cry from the first moment of awareness, the cry that was a longing for warmth and safety. And through our adolescent fantasies, and however our adult reasoning may disguise it, the search continues. A search for what? Security? Tranquillity? Identity? We might each give it a different name.

A Mexican painter, Siqueiros, named one of his pictures 'The Echo of a Scream'. The baby's wail in that picture rang in my ears long after I saw the painting until after a while, it had become less specifically the scream of the baby in the picture, and more and more a cry universal, tearless but persistent. Thus it occurred to me that for many people

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memories of childhood, however cheerfully remembered, and whether we stayed at home or wandered, were each in their way the echo of a cry.







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